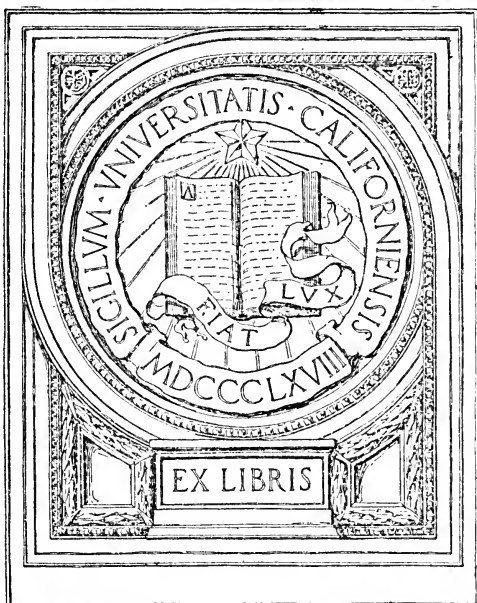
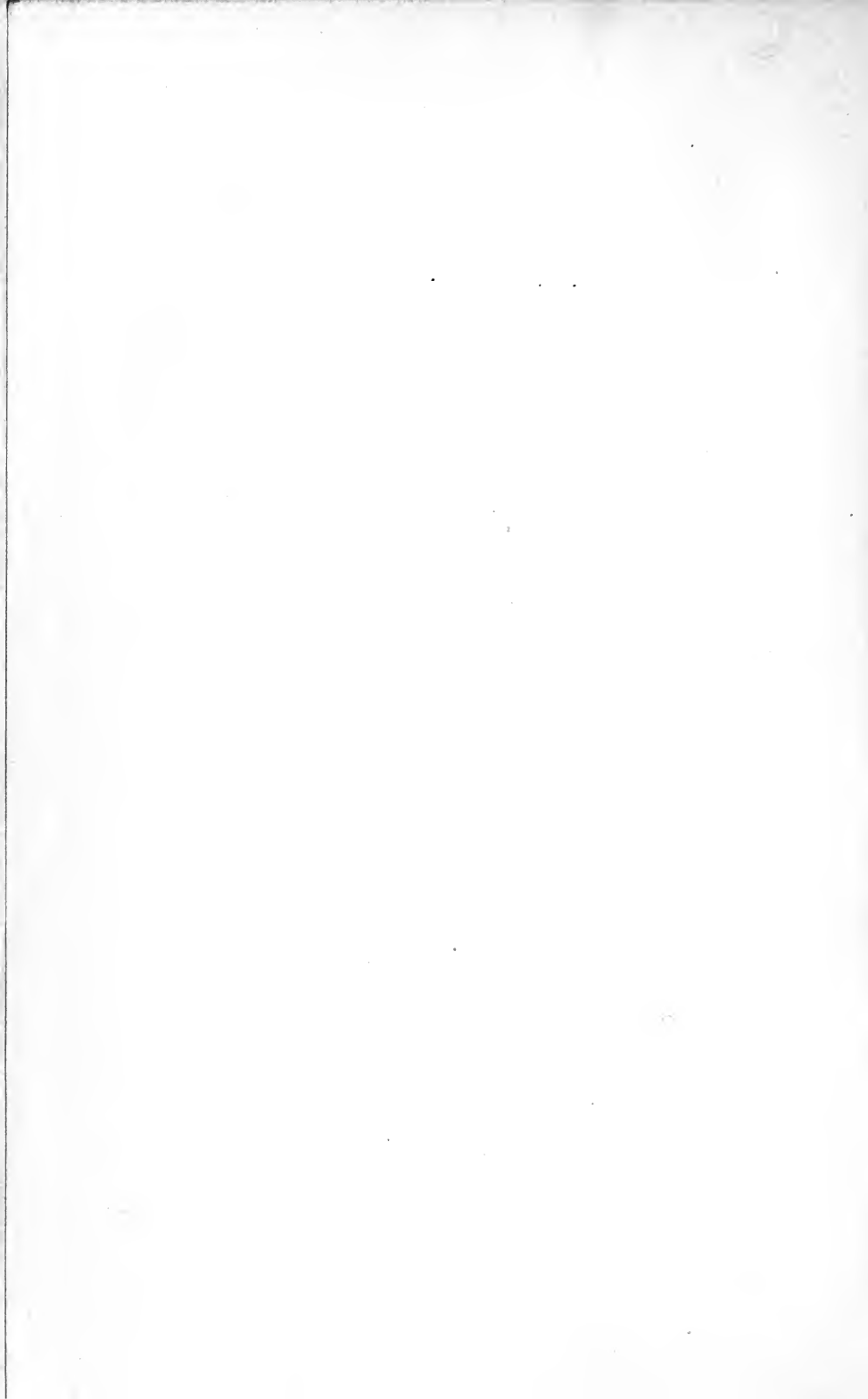




GIFT OF
Ambrose Bierce



EX LIBRIS



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

THE COLLECTED WORKS
OF AMBROSE BIERCE

VOLUME X

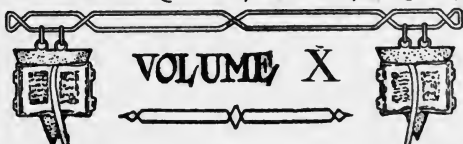


The publishers certify that this edition of

THE COLLECTED WORKS OF
AMBROSE BIERCE

*consists of two hundred and fifty numbered sets, auto-
graphed by the author, and that the number of this
set is.....²*

THE COLLECTED WORKS OF AMBROSE BIERCE



VOLUME X

THE
OPINIONATOR



NEW YORK & WASHINGTON
THE NEALE PUBLISHING COMPANY
1911

FREDERICK

POLLEY

COPYRIGHT, 1911, BY
THE NEALE PUBLISHING COMPANY

TO THE
NEALE PUBLISHING COMPANY

CONTENTS

PAGE

THE OPINIONATOR

THE NOVEL	17
ON LITERARY CRITICISM	25
STAGE ILLUSION	49
THE MATTER OF MANNER	57
ON READING NEW BOOKS	65
ALPHABÊTES AND BORDER RUFFIANS	69
TO TRAIN A WRITER	75
AS TO CARTOONING	79
THE S. P. W.	87
PORTRAITS OF ELDERLY AUTHORS	95
WIT AND HUMOR	98
WORD CHANGES AND SLANG	103
THE RAVAGES OF SHAKSPEARITIS	109
ENGLAND'S LAUREATE	113
HALL CAINE ON HALL CAINING	117
VISIONS OF THE NIGHT	122

THE REVIEWER

EDWIN MARKHAM'S POEMS	137
"THE KREUTZER SONATA"	149
EMMA FRANCES DAWSON	166
MARIE BASHKIRTSEFF	172
A POET AND HIS POEM	177

THE CONTROVERSIALIST

AN INSURRECTION OF THE PEASANTRY	189
--	-----

CONTENTS

	PAGE
MONTAGUES AND CAPULETS	209
A DEAD LION	212
THE SHORT STORY	234
WHO ARE GREAT?	249
POETRY AND VERSE	256
THOUGHT AND FEELING	274
THE TIMOROUS REPORTER	
THE PASSING OF SATIRE	281
SOME DISADVANTAGES OF GENIUS	285
OUR SACROSANCT ORTHOGRAPHY	299
THE AUTHOR AS AN OPPORTUNITY	306
ON POSTHUMOUS RENOWN	311
THE CRIME OF INATTENTION	317
FETISHISM	321
OUR AUDIBLE SISTERS	327
THE NEW PENOLOGY	331
THE NATURE OF WAR	336
HOW TO GROW GREAT	342
A WAR IN THE ORIENT	346
A JUST DECISION	356
THE LION'S DEN	360
THE MARCH HARE	
A FLOURISHING INDUSTRY	369
THE RURAL PRESS	373
TO "ELEVATE THE STAGE"	376
PECTOLITE	379
LA BOULANGÈRE	382
ADVICE TO OLD MEN	385
A DUBIOUS VINDICATION	388
THE JAMAICAN MONGOOSE	391

THE OPINIONATOR

THE NOVEL

THOSE who read no books but new ones have this much to say for themselves in mitigation of censure: they do not read all the new ones. They can not; with the utmost diligence and devotion—never weary in ill doing—they can not hope to get through one in a hundred. This, I should suppose, must make them unhappy. They probably feel as a small boy of limited capacity would in a country with all the springs running treacle and all the trees loaded with preserved fruits.

The annual output of books in this country alone is something terrible—not fewer, I am told, than from seven thousand to nine thousand. This should be enough to gratify the patriot who “points with pride” to the fact that Americans are a reading people, but does not point with anything to the quality of what they read. There are apparently more novels than anything else, and these have

18 THE COLLECTED WORKS

incomparably the largest sales. The "best seller" is always a novel and a bad one.

In my poor judgment there have not been published in any one quarter-century a half dozen novels that posterity will take the trouble to read. It is not to be denied that some are worth reading, for some have been written by great writers; and whatever is written by a great writer is likely to merit attention. But between that which is worth reading and that which was worth writing there is a distinction. For a man who can do great work, to do work that is less great than the best that he can do is not worth while, and novel-writing, I hold, does not bring out the best that is in him.

The novel bears the same relation to literature that the panorama bears to painting. With whatever skill and feeling the panorama is painted, it must lack that basic quality in all art, unity, totality of effect. As it can not all be seen at once, its parts must be seen successively, each effacing the one seen before; and at the last there remains no coherent and harmonious memory of the work. It is the same with a story too long to be read with a virgin attention at a single sitting.

A novel is a diluted story—a story cumbered with trivialities and nonessentials. I have never seen one that could not be bettered by cutting out a half or three-quarters of it.

The novel is a snow plant; it has no root in the permanent soil of literature, and does not long hold its place. It is of the lowest form of imagination—imagination chained to the perch of probability. What wonder that in this unnatural captivity it pines and dies? The novelist is, after all, but a reporter of a larger growth. True, he invents his facts (which the reporter of the newspaper is known never to do) and his characters; but, having them in hand, what can he do? His chains are heavier than himself. The line that bounds his little Dutch garden of probability, separating it from the golden realm of art—the sun and shadow land of fancy—is to him a dead-line. Let him transgress it at his peril.

In England and America the art of novel-writing (in so far as it is an art) is as dead as Queen Anne; in America as dead as Queen Ameresia. (There never was a Queen Ameresia—that is why I choose her for the com-

20 THE COLLECTED WORKS

parison.) As a literary method it never had any other element of vitality than the quality from which it has its name. Having no legitimate place in the scheme of letters, its end was inevitable.

When Richardson and Fielding set the novel going, hardly more than a century-and-a-half ago, it charmed a generation to which it was new. From their day to ours, with a lessening charm, it has taken the attention of the multitude, and grieved the judicious, but, its impulse exhausted, it stops by its inherent inertia. Its dead body we shall have with us, doubtless, for many years, but its soul "is with the saints, I trust."

This is true, not only locally but generally. So far as I am able to judge, no good novels are now "made in Germany," nor in France, nor in any European country except Russia. The Russians are writing novels which so far as one may venture to judge (dimly discerning their quality through the opacity of translation, for one does not read Russian) are, in their way, admirable; full of fire and light, like an opal. Tourgenieff, Pushkin, Gogol and the early Tolstoi—these be big names. In their hands the novel grew great (as it

did in those of Richardson and Fielding, and as it would have done in those of Thackeray and Pater if greatness in that form of fiction had been longer possible in England) because, first, they were great men, and second, the novel was a new form of expression in a world of new thought and life. In Russia the soil is not exhausted: it produces without fertilizers. There we find simple, primitive conditions, and the novel holds something of the elemental passions of the race, unsophisticated by introspection, analysis of motive, problemism, dissection of character, and the other "odious subtleties" that go before a fall. But the blight is upon it even there, with an encroachment visible in the compass of a single lifetime. Compare Tolstoy's *The Cossacks* with his latest work in fiction, and you will see an individual decadence prefiguring a national; just as one was seen in the interval between *Adam Bede* and *Daniel Deronda*. When the story-teller is ambitious to be a philosopher there is an end to good story-telling. Novelists are now all philosophers—excepting those who have "stumbled to eternal mock" as reformers.

With the romance—which in form so re-

22 THE COLLECTED WORKS

sembles the novel that many otherwise worthy persons are but dimly aware of the essential distinction—matters are somewhat otherwise. The romancist has not to encounter at a disadvantage the formidable competition of his reader's personal experience. He can represent life, not as it is, but as it might be; character, not as he finds it, but as he wants it. His plot knows no law but that of its own artistic development; his incidents do not require the authenticating hand and seal of any censorship but that of taste. The vitality of his art is eternal; it is perpetually young. He taps the great permanent mother-lode of human interest. His materials are infinite in abundance and cosmic in distribution. Nothing that can be known, or thought, or felt, or dreamed, but is available if he can manage it. He is lord of two worlds and may select his characters from both. In the altitudes where his imagination waves her joyous wing there are no bars for her to beat her breast against; the universe is hers, and unlike the sacred bird Simurgh, which is omnipotent on condition of never exerting its power, she may do as she will. And so it comes about that

while the novel is accidental and transient, the romance is essential and permanent. The novelist, whatever his ability, writes in the shifting sand; the only age that understands his work is that which has not forgotten the social conditions environing his characters—namely, their own period; but the romancist has cut his work into the living rock. Richardson and Fielding already seem absurd. We are beginning to quarrel with Thackeray, and Dickens needs a glossary. Thirty years ago I saw a list of scores of words used by Dickens that had become obsolete. They were mostly the names of homely household objects no longer in use; he had named them in giving “local color” and the sense of “reality.” Contemporary novels are read by none but the reviewers and the multitude—which will read anything if it is long, untrue and new enough. Men of sane judgment and taste still illuminate their minds and warm their hearts in Scott’s suffusing glow; the strange, heatless glimmer of Hawthorne fascinates more and more; the *Thousand-and-One Nights* holds its captaincy of tale-telling. Whatever a great man does he is likely

24 THE COLLECTED WORKS

to do greatly, but had Hugo set the powers of his giant intellect to the making of mere novels his superiority to the greatest of those who have worked in that barren art might have seemed somewhat less measureless than it is.

1897.

ON LITERARY CRITICISM

I

THE saddest thing about the trade of writing is that the writer can never know, nor hope to know, if he is a good workman. In literary criticism there are no criteria, no accepted standards of excellence by which to test the work. Sainte-Beuve says that the art of criticism consists in saying the first thing that comes into one's head. Doubtless he was thinking of his own head, a fairly good one. There is a difference between the first thing that comes into one head and the first thing that comes into another; and it is not always the best kind of head that concerns itself with literary criticism.

Having no standards, criticism is an erring guide. Its pronouncements are more interesting than valuable, and interesting chiefly from the insight that they give into the mind, not of the writer criticised, but of the writer criticising. Hence the greater interest that they have when delivered by one of whom

26 THE COLLECTED WORKS

the reader already knows something. So the newspapers are not altogether unwise when asking an eminent merchant to pass judgment on a new poet, or a distinguished soldier to "sit" in the case of a rising young novelist. We learn something about the merchant or the soldier, and that may amuse. As a guide to literary excellence even the most accomplished critic's judgment on his contemporaries is of little value. Posterity more frequently reverses than affirms it.

The reason is not far to seek. An author's work is usually the product of his environment. He collaborates with his era; his co-workers are time and place. All his neighbors and all the conditions in which they live have a hand in the work. His own individuality, unless uncommonly powerful and original, is "subdued to what it works in." But this is true, too, of his critic, whose limitations are drawn by the same iron authority. Subject to the same influences, good and bad, following the same literary fashions, the critic who is contemporary with his author holds his court in the market-place and polls a fortuitous jury. In diagnosing the disorder of a person suspected of hydrophobia the physi-

cian ought not to have been bitten by the same dog.

The taste of the many being notoriously bad and that of the few dubious, what is the author to do for judgment on his work? He is to wait. In a few centuries, more or less, may arise a critic that we call Posterity. This fellow will have as many limitations, probably, as the other had—will bow the knee to as many literary Baäls and err as widely from the paths leading to the light. But his false gods will not be those of to-day, whose hideousness will disclose itself to his undevout vision, and in his deviations from the true trail he will cross and chart our tracks. Better than all, he will know and care little about the lives and characters, the personalities, of those of us whose work has lasted till his time. On that coign of vantage he will stand and deliver a juster judgment. It will enable him to judge our work with impartiality, as if it had fallen from the skies or sprung up from the ground without human agency.

One can hardly overrate the advantage to the critic of ignorance of his author. Biographies of men of action are well enough; the lives that such men live are all there is

28 THE COLLECTED WORKS

of them except themselves. But men of thought—that is different. You can not narrate thought, nor describe it, yet it is the only relevant thing in the life of an author. Anything else darkens counsel. We go to biography for side lights on an author's work; to his work for side lights on his character. The result is confusion and disability, for personal character and literary character have little to say to each other, despite the fact that so tremendous a chap as Taine builded an entire and most unearthly biography of Shakespeare on no firmer foundation than the "internal evidence" of the plays and sonnets. Of all the influences that make for incapable criticism the biographer of authors is the most pernicious. One needs not be a friend to organized labor to wish that the fellow's working hours might be reduced from twenty-four to eight.

Neither the judgment of the populace nor that of the critics being of value to an author concerned about his rank in the hierarchy of letters, and that of posterity being a trifle slow, he seems to be reduced to the expedient of taking his own word for it. And his opinion of himself may not be so far out of

the way. Read Goethe's conversations with Eckermann and see how accurately the great man appraised himself.

When scratched in a newspaper Heine said: "I am to be judged in the assizes of literature. I know who I am."

About the shrine of every famous author awaits a cloud of critics to pay an orderly and decorous homage to his genius. There is no crowding: if one of them sees that he can not perform his prostration until after his saint shall have been forgotten along with the intellectual miracles he wrought, that patient worshiper turns aside to level his shins at another shrine. There are shrines enough for all, God knows!

The most mischievous, because the ablest, of all this sycophantic crew is Mr. Howells, who finds every month, and reads, two or three books—always novels—of high literary merit. As no man who has anything else to do can critically read more than two or three books in a month—and I will say for Mr. Howells that he is a conscientious reader—and as some hundreds are published in the same period, one is curious to know how many books of high literary merit he would

30 THE COLLECTED WORKS

find if he could read them all. But Mr. Howells is no ordinary sycophant—not he. True, having by mischance read a book divinely bad, even when judged according to his own test, and having resolved to condemn nothing except in a general way—as the artillerists in the early days of the Civil War used to “shell the woods”—he does not purpose to lose his labor, and therefore commends the book along with the others; but as a rule he distributes the distinctions that he has to confer according to a system—to those, namely, whose work in fiction most nearly resembles his own. That is his way of propagating the Realistic faith which his poverty of imagination has compelled him to adopt and his necessities to defend. “Ah, yes, a beautiful animal,” said the camel of the horse—“if he only had a hump!”

To show what literary criticism has accomplished in education of the public taste I beg to refer the reader to any number of almost any magazine. Here is one, for instance, containing a paper by one Bowker on contemporary English novelists—he novelists and she novelists—to the number of about forty. And only the “eminent” ones are men-

tioned. To most American readers some of the books of most of these authors are more or less familiar, and nine in ten of these readers will indubitably accept Mr. Bowker's high estimate of the genius of the authors themselves. These have one good quality—they are industrious: most of them have published ten to forty novels each, the latter number being the favorite at this date and eliciting Mr. Bowker's lively admiration. The customary rate of production is one a year, though two are not unusual, there being nothing in the law forbidding. Mr. Bowker has the goodness to tell us all he knows about these persons' methods of work; that is to say, all that they have told him. The amount of patient research, profound thought and systematic planning that go to the making of one of their books is (naturally) astonishing. Unfortunately it falls just short of the amount that kills.

Add to the forty eminent English novelists another forty American, equally eminent—at least in their own country—and similarly industrious. We have then an average annual output of, say, eighty novels which have the right to expect to be widely read and en-

thusiastically reviewed. This in two countries, in one of which the art of novel writing is dead, in the other of which it has not been born. Truly this is an age of growing literary activity; our novelists are as lively and diligent as maggots in the carcass of a horse. There is a revival of baseball, too.

If our critics were wiser than their dupes could this mass of insufferable stuff be dumped upon the land? Could the little men and foolish women who write it command the persevering admiration of their fellow-creatures, who think it a difficult thing to do? I make no account here of the mere book-reporters of the newspapers, whose purpose and ambition are, not to guide the public taste but to follow it, and who are therefore in no sense critics. The persons whom I am considering are those ingenious gentlemen who in the magazines and reviews are expected to, and do, write of books with entire independence of their own market. Are there anywhere more than one, two or three like Percival Pollard, with "Gifford's heavy hand" to "crush without remorse" the intolerable rout of commonplace men and women swarming innumerable upon the vacant seats of the

dead giants and covering the slopes of Parnassus like a flock of crows?

Your critic of widest vogue and chief authority among us is he who is best skilled in reading between the lines; in interpreting an author's purpose; in endowing him with a "problem" and noting his degree of skill in its solution. The author—stupid fellow!—did not write between the lines, had no purpose but to entertain, was unaware of a problem. So much the worse for him; so much the better for his expounder. Interlinear cipher, purpose, problem, are all the critic's own, and he derives a lively satisfaction in his creation—looks upon it and pronounces it good. Nothing is more certain than that if a writer of genius should "bring to his task" of writing a book the purposes which the critics would surely trace in the completed work the book would remain forever unwritten, to the unspeakable advantage of letters and morals.

In illustration of these remarks and suggesting them, take these book reviews in a single number of *The Atlantic*. There we learn, concerning Mr. Cable, that his controlling purpose in *The Grandissimes* was that

34 THE COLLECTED WORKS

of "presenting the problem of the reorganization of Southern society"—that "the book was in effect a parable"; that in *Dr. Sevier* he "essayed to work out through personal relations certain problems [always a problem or two] which vexed him regarding poverty and labor"; that in *Bonaventure* he "sets himself another task," which is "to work out [always something to 'work out'] the regeneration of man through knowledge"—a truly formidable "task." Of the author of *Queen Money*, we are told by the same expounder that she has "set herself no task beyond her power," but "had it in mind to trace the influence of the greed for wealth upon a section of contemporaneous society." Of Mr. Bellamy, author of *Looking Backward* (the heroine of which is not Mrs. Lot) we are confidently assured in ailing metaphor that "he feels intensely the bitter inequalities of the present order" of things and "thinks he sees a remedy,"—our old friends again: the "problem" and the "solution"—both afterthoughts of Mr. Bellamy. The "task" which in *Marzio's Crucifix* Marion Crawford "sets himself" is admirably simple—by a "characteristic outwardness" to protect us against "a too

intimate and subtle corrosive of life." As a savior of the world against this awful peril Crawford may justly have claimed a vote of thanks; but possibly he was content with that humbler advantage, the profit from the sale of his book. But (it may be protested) the critic who is to live by his trade must say *something*. True, but is it necessary that he live by his trade?

Carlyle's prophecy of a time when all literature should be one vast review is in process of fulfilment. Aubrey de Vere has written a critical analysis of poetry, chiefly that of Spenser and Wordsworth. An *Atlantic* man writes a critical analysis of Aubrey de Vere's critical analysis. Shall I not write a critical analysis of the *Atlantic* man's critical analysis of Aubrey de Vere's critical analysis of poetry? I can do so adequately in three words: It is nonsense.

Spenser, also, it appears, "set himself a task," had his "problem," "worked it out." "The figures of his embroidered poem," we are told, "are conceived and used in accordance with a comprehensive doctrine of the nature of humanity, which Spenser undoubtedly meant to enforce through the medium of

36 THE COLLECTED WORKS

his imagination." That is to say, the author of *The Faerie Queene* did not "sing because he could not choose but sing," but because he was burdened with a doctrine. He had a nut to crack and, faith! he must crack it or he would be sick. "Resolved into its moral elements" (whether by Aubrey de Vere or the *Atlantic* man I can only guess without reading de Vere's work in two volumes, which God forbid!) the glowing work of Spenser is a sermon which "teaches specifically how to attain self-control and how to meet attacks from without; or rather how to seek those many forms of error which do mischief in the world, and to overcome them for the world's welfare." Precisely: the animal is a pig and a bird; or rather it is a fish. So much for Spenser, whom his lovers may re-read if they like in the new light of this person's critical analysis. It is rather hard that, being dead, he can not have the advantage of going over his work with so intelligent a guide as Aubrey de Vere. He would be astonished by his own profundity.

How literary reviewing may be acceptably done in Boston may be judged by the following passage from the *Boston Literary Review*:

“When Miss Emma Frances Dawson wrote *An Itinerant House* she was plainly possessed of a desire to emulate Poe and turn out a collection of stories which, once read, the mention of them would make the blood curdle. There is no need to say that Poe’s position is still secure, but Miss Dawson has succeeded in writing some very creditable stories of their kind.”

The reviewer that can discern in Miss Dawson’s work “a desire to emulate Poe,” or can find in it even a faint suggestion of Poe, may justly boast himself accessible to any folly that comes his way. There is no more similarity between the work of the two writers than there is between that of Dickens and that of Macaulay, or that of Addison and that of Carlyle. Poe in his prose tales deals sometimes with the supernatural; Miss Dawson always. But hundreds of writers do the same; if that constitutes similarity and suggests intentional “emulation” what shall be said of those tales which resemble one another in that element’s omission? The truth probably is that the solemn gentleman who wrote that judgment had not read Poe since childhood, and did not read Miss Dawson at all. More-

38 THE COLLECTED WORKS

over, no excellence in her work would have saved it from his disparaging comparison if he had read it. "Poe's position" would still have been "secure," for to such minds as his it is unthinkable that an established fame (no matter how, when or where established) should not signify an unapproachable merit. If he had lived in Poe's time how he would have sneered at that writer's attempt to emulate Walpole! And had he been a contemporary of Walpole that ambitious person would have incurred a stinging rap on the head for aspiring to displace the immortal Gormley Hobb.

The fellow goes on:

"To one steeped in the gruesome weirdness of a master of the gentle art of blood-curdling the stories are not too impressive, but he who picks up the book fresh from a fairy tale is apt to become somewhat nervous in the reading. The tales allow Miss Dawson to weave in some very pretty verse."

The implication that Miss Dawson's tales are intended to be "gruesome," "blood-curdling," and so forth, is a foolish implication. Their supernaturalism is not of that kind. The blood that they could curdle is diseased

blood which it would be at once a kindly office and a high delight to shed. And fancy this inexpressible creature calling Miss Dawson's verse "pretty"!—the *ballade* of "The Sea of Sleep" "pretty"! My compliments to him:

Dull spirit, few among us be your days,
The bright to damn, the fatuous to praise;
And God deny, your flesh when you unload,
Your prayer to live as tenant of a toad,
With powers direr than your present sort:
Able the wights you jump on to bewart.

The latest author of "uncanny" tales to suffer from the ready reckoner's short cut to the solution of the problem of literary merit, the ever-serviceable comparison with Edgar Allan Poe, is Mr. W. C. Morrow. Doubtless he had hoped that this cup might pass by him—had implored the rosy goddess Psora, who enjoys the critic's person and inspires his pen, to go off duty, but it was not to be; that diligent deity is never weary of ill doing and her devotees, pursuing the evil tenor of their way, have sounded the Scotch fiddle to the customary effect. Mr. Morrow's admirable book, *The Ape, the Idiot and*

Other People, is gravely ascribed to the paternity of Poe, as was Miss Dawson's before it, and some of mine before that. And until Gabriel, with one foot upon the sea and the other upon the neck of the last living critic, shall swear that the time for doing this thing is up, every writer of stories a little out of the common must suffer the same sickening indignity. To the ordinary microcephalous bibliopomps—the book-butchers of the newspapers—criticism is merely a process of marking upon the supposed stature of an old writer the supposed stature of a new, without ever having taken the trouble to measure that of the old; they accept hearsay evidence for that. Does one write “gruesome stories”?—they invoke Poe; essays?—they out with their Addison; satirical verse?—they have at him with Pope—and so on, through the entire category of literary forms. Each has its dominant great name, learned usually in the district school, easily carried in memory and obedient to the call of need. And because these strabismic ataxiates, who fondly fancy themselves shepherding auctorial flocks upon the slopes of Parnassus, are unable to write of one writer without thinking of another, they

naturally assume that the writer of whom they write is affected with the same disability and has always in mind as a model the standard name dominating his chosen field—the impeccant hegemon of the province.

II

Mr. Hamlin Garland, writing with the corn-fed enthusiasm of the prairies, “hails the dawn of a new era” in literature—an era which is to be distinguished by dominance of the Western man. That a great new literature is to “come out of the West” because of broad prairies and wide rivers and big mountains and infrequent boundary lines—that is a conviction dear indeed to the Western mind which has discovered that marks can be made on paper with a pen. A few years ago the Eastern mind was waiting wide-eyed to “hail the dawn” of a literature that was to be “distinctively American,” for the Eastern mind in those days claimed a share in the broad prairies, the wide rivers and the big mountains, with all the competencies, suggestions, inspirations and other appurtenances thereunto belonging—a heritage which now Mr. Garland austerey denies to any one born and

42 THE COLLECTED WORKS

"raised" on the morning side of the Alleghanies. The "distinctively American literature" has not materialized, excepting in the works of Americans distinctively illiterate; and there are no visible signs of a distinctively Western one. Even the Californian sort, so long heralded by prophets blushing with conscious modesty in the foretelling, seems loth to leave off its damnable faces and begin. The best Californian, the best Western, the best American books have the least of geographical "distinctiveness," and most closely conform to the universal and immutable laws of the art, as known to Aristotle and Longinus.

The effect of physical-geographical environment on literary production is mostly nil; racial and educational considerations only are of controlling importance. Despite Madame de Staël's engaging dictum that "every Englishman is an island," the natives of that scanty plot have produced a literature which in breadth of thought and largeness of method we sons of a continent, brothers to the broad prairies, wide rivers and big mountains, have not matched and give no promise of matching. It is all very fine to be a child o' natur' with a home in the settin' sun, but

when the child o' natur' with a knack at scribbling pays rent to Phœbus by renouncing the incomparable advantage of strict subjection to literary law he pays too dearly.

Nothing new is to be learned in any of the great arts—the ancients looted the whole field. Nor do first-rate minds seek anything new. They are assured of primacy under the conditions of their art as they find it—under any conditions. It is the lower order of intelligence that is ingenious, inventive, alert for original methods and new forms. Napoleon added nothing to the art of war, in either strategy or tactics. Shakspeare tried no new meters, did nothing that had not been done before—merely did better what had been done. In the Parthenon was no new architectural device, and in the Sistine Madonna all the effects were got by methods as familiar as speech. The only way in which it is worth while to differ from others is in point of superior excellence. Be “original,” ambitious Westerner—always as original as you please. But know, or if you already know remember, that originality strikes and dazzles only when displayed within the limiting lines of form. Above all, remember that the most

44 THE COLLECTED WORKS

ineffective thing in literature is that quality, whatever in any case it may be, which is best designated in terms of geographical classification. The work of whose form and methods one naturally thinks as —not “English”; that is a racial word, but—“American” or “Australian” or (in this country) “Eastern,” “Mid-Western,” “Southern” or “Californian” is worthless. The writer who knows no better than to make or try to make his work “racy of the soil” knows nothing of his art worth knowing.

III

Charles A. Dana held that California could not rightly claim the glory of such literature as she had, for none of her writers of distinction—such distinction as they had—was born there. We were austere reminded that “even the sheen of gold is less attractive than the lustre of intellectual genius.” “California!” cried this severe but not uncompassionate critic—“California! how musical is the word. And again we cry out, California! Give us the letters of high thought: give us philosophy and romance and poetry and art. Give us the soul!”

How many men and women who scorn delights and live laborious days to glorify our metropolis with "the letters of high thought" are on Fame's muster-roll as natives of Manhattan island? Doubtless the state of New York, as also the city of that name, can make an honorable showing in the matter of native authors, but it has certain considerable advantages that California lacks. In the first place, there are many more births in New York, supplying a strong numerical presumption that more geniuses will turn up there. Second, it has (I hope) enjoyed that advantage for many, many years; whereas California was "settled" (and by the non-genius-bearing sex) a good deal later. In this competition the native Californian author is handicapped by the onerous condition that in order to have his nose counted he must have been born in the pre-Woman period or acquired enough of reputation for the rumor of his merit to have reached New York's ears, and for the noise of it to have roused her from the contemplation of herself, before he has arrived at middle age. This is not an "impossible" condition; it is only an exceedingly hard one. How hard it is a little reflection on facts will

46 THE COLLECTED WORKS

show. The rule is, the world over, that the literary army of the "metropolis" is recruited in the "provinces," or, more accurately, *from* the provinces. The difference denoted by the prepositions is important: for every provincial writer who, like Bret Harte, achieves at home enough distinction to be sought out and lured to a "literary metropolis," ten unknown ones go there of their own motion, like Rudyard Kipling, and become distinguished afterward. They wrote equally well where they were, but they might have continued to write there until dead of age, and but for some lucky accident or fortuitous concurrence of favoring circumstances they would never have been heard of in the "literary metropolis."

We may call it so, but New York is not a literary metropolis, nor is London, nor is Paris. In letters there is no metropolis. The literary capital is not a mother-city, founding colonies; it is the creature of its geographical environment, giving out nothing, taking in everything. If not constantly fed with fresh brains from beyond and about, its chance of primacy and domination would be merely proportional to its population. This centri-

petal tendency—this converging movement of provincial writers upon the literary capital, is itself the strongest possible testimony to the disadvantages which they suffer at home; for in nearly every instance it is made—commonly at a great sacrifice—in pursuit of recognition. The motive may not be a very creditable one; I think myself it is ridiculous, as is all ambition, not to excel, but to be known to excel; but such is the motive. If the provincial writer could as easily obtain recognition at home he would stay there.

For my part, I freely admit that “the Golden State can not ‘boast’ of any native literary celebrities of the first rank,” for I do not consider the incident of a literary celebrity of the first rank having been born in one place instead of another a thing to boast of. If there is an idler and more barren work than the rating of writers according to merit it is their classification according to birth-place. A racial classification is interesting because it corresponds to something in nature, but among authors of the same race—and that race the restless Americans, who are about as likely to be born in a railway car as anywhere, and whose first instinct is to get away from

48 THE COLLECTED WORKS

home—this classification is without meaning. If it is ever otherwise than capitally impudent in the people of a political or geographical division to be proud of a great writer (as George the Third was of an abundant harvest) it is least impudent in those of the one in which he did his worthiest work, most so in those of the one in which he was born.

STAGE ILLUSION

SUCH to-day is the condition of the drama that the "scenic artist" and the carpenter are its hope and its pride. They are the props and pillars of the theatre, without which the edifice would fall to pieces. But there are "some of us fellows," as a Bishop of Lincoln used to say to his brother prelates, who consider scenery an impertinence and its painter a creature for whose existence there is no warrant of art nor justification of taste.

I am no *laudator temporis acti*, but I submit that in this matter of the drama the wisdom of the centuries is better than the caprice of the moment. For some thousands of years, dramatists, actors and audiences got on very well without recourse to the mechanical devices that we esteem necessary to the art of stage representation. Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Shakspeare—what did they know of scenery and machinery? You may say that the Greeks knew little of painting, so could

have no scenery. They had something better—imagination. Why did they not use pulleys, and trap-doors, and real water, and live horses?—they had *them*; and Ben Jonson and Shakspeare could have had painters enow, God knows. Why, in their time the stage was lighted with naked and unashamed candles and strewn with rushes, and favored ones of the audience—"gentlemen of wit and pleasure about town"—occupied seats upon it! If the action was supposed to be taking place in a street in Verona did not the play-bill so explain? A word to the wise was sufficient: the gentlemen of wit and pleasure went to the play to watch the actor's face, observe his gestures, critically note his elocution. They would have resented with their handy hangers an attempt to obtrude upon their attention the triumphs of the "scenic artist," the machinist and the property-man. As for the "groundlings," they were there by sufferance only, and might comprehend or not, as it might or might not please their Maker to work a miracle in their stupid nowls.

Now it is all for the groundlings; the stage has no longer "patrons," and "His Majesty's Players" are the servants of the masses, to

whom the author's text must be presented with explanatory notes by those learned commentators, Messrs. Daub and Toggle—whom may the good devil besmear with yellows and make mad with a tin moon!

What! shall I go to the theatre to be pleased with colored canvas, affrighted with a storm that is half dried peas and t'other half sheet-iron? Shall I take any part of my evening's pleasure from the dirty hands of an untidy anarchist who shakes a blue rag to represent the Atlantic Ocean, while another sandlot orator navigates a cloth-yard three-decker across the middle distance? Am I to be interested in the personal appearance of a centre-table and the adventures of half a dozen chairs—albeit they are better than the one given me to sit on?

Shall makers of fine furniture aspire
To scorn my lower needs and feed my higher?
And vile upholsterers be taught to slight
My body's comfort for my mind's delight?

Where is the sense of all these devices for producing an "illusion?" Illusion, indeed! When you look at art do you wish to persuade yourself that it is only nature? Take the

52 THE COLLECTED WORKS

Laocoön—would it be pleasant or instructive to forget, for even a moment, that it is a group of inanimate figures, and think yourself gazing on a living man and two living children in the folds of two living snakes? When you stand before a “nativity” by some old master, do you fancy yourself a real ass at a real manger? Deception is no part of art, for only in its non-essentials is art a true copy of nature. If it is anything more, why, then the Shah of Persia was a judicious critic. Shown a picture of a donkey by Landseer and told that it was worth five hundred pounds, he contemptuously replied that for five pounds he could buy the donkey. The man who holds that art should be a certified copy of nature, and produce an illusion in the mind, has no right to smile at this anecdote. It is his business in this life not to laugh, but to be laughed at.

Seeing that stage illusion is neither desirable nor attainable, the determined efforts to achieve it that have been making during these last few decades seem very melancholy indeed. It is as if a dog should spin himself sick in pursuit of his tail, which he neither can catch nor could profit by if he caught it.

Failure displeases in proportion to the effort, and it would be judicious to stop a little short of real water, and live horses, and trains of cars that will work. Nay, why should we have streets and drawing-rooms (with mantel-clocks and coal scuttles complete) and castles with battlements? Or if the play is so vilely constructed as to require them, why must the street have numbered house-doors, the drawing-room an adjoining library and conservatory, and the battlements a growth of ivy? Of course no sane mind would justify poor Boucicault's wall that sinks to represent the ascent of the man "climbing it" by standing on the ground and working his legs, but we are only a trifle less ridiculous when we have any scenic effects at all. The difference is one of degree, and if we are to have representations of inanimate objects it is hard to say at what we should stick. Our intellectual gorge may now rise at the spectacle of a battered and blood-stained "Nancy" dragging her wrecked carcass along the stage to escape the club of a "Sykes," for it is as new as once were the horrible death-agonies constituting the charm of the acting of a Croizette; but the line of distinction is arbitrary, and

54 THE COLLECTED WORKS

no one can say how soon we shall expect to see the blood of "Cæsar" spouting from his wound instead of being content with "Antony's" rather graphic description of it. It is of the nature of realism never to stop till it gets to the bottom.

Inasmuch as the actor must wear something—a necessity from which the actress is largely free—he may as well wear the costume appropriate to his part. But this is about as far as art permits him to go in the way of "illusion"; another step and he is on the "unsteadfast footing" of popular caprice and vulgar fashion. Of course if the playwright has chosen to make a window, a coach, a horse, church spire, or whale one of his *dramatis personæ* we must have it in some form, offensive as it is; the mistake which was his in so constructing the play is ours when we go to see it. In the old playbooks the "Scene—a Bridge in Venice," "Scene—a Cottage in the Black Forest," "Scene—a Battle Field," etc., were not intended as instructions to the manager, but to the spectator. The author did not expect these things to be shown on the stage, but imagined in the auditorium. They were mere hints and helps to the imagination,

which, as an artist, it was his business to stimulate and guide, and the modern playwright, as a fool, decrees it his duty to discourage and repress. The play should require as few accessories as possible, and to those actually required the manager should confine himself. We may grant Shakspeare his open grave in *Hamlet*, but the impertinence of real earth in it we should resent; while the obtrusion of adjacent tombs and headstones at large is a capital crime. If we endure a play in which a man is pitched out of a window we must perforce endure the window; but the cornice, curtains and tassels; the three or four similar windows with nobody pitched out of them; the ancestral portrait on the wall and the suit of armor in the niche; what have these to do with the matter? We can see them anywhere at any time; we wish to know how not to see them. They are of the vulgarities. They distract attention from the actor, and under cover of the diversion he plays badly. Is it any wonder that he does not care to compete with a gilt cornice and a rep sofa?

On the Athenian stage, a faulty gesture, a sin in rhetoric, a false quantity or accent—these were visited with the dire displeasure

56 THE COLLECTED WORKS

of an audience in whom the art-sense was sweeter than honey and stronger than a lion; an audience that went to the play to see the play, to discriminate, compare, mark the conformity of individual practice to universal principle: in a word, to criticise. They enjoyed that rarest and ripest of all pleasures, the use of trained imagination. There was the naked majesty of art, there the severe simplicity of taste. And there came not the carpenter with his machines, the upholsterer with his stuffs, nor the painter with blotches of impertinent color, crazing the eye and grieving the heart.

THE MATTER OF MANNER

I HAVE sometimes fancied that a musical instrument retains among its capabilities and potentialities something of the character, some hint of the soul, some waiting echo from the life of each who has played upon it: that the violin which Paganini had touched was not altogether the same afterward as before, nor had quite so fine a fibre after some coarser spirit had stirred its strings. Our language is a less delicate instrument: it is not susceptible to a debasing contagion; it receives no permanent and essential impress but from the hand of skill. You may fill it with false notes, and these will speak discordant when invoked by a clumsy hand; but when the master plays they are all unheard—silent in the quickened harmonies of masters who have played before.

My design is to show in the lucidest way that I can the supreme importance of words, their domination of thought, their mastery of character. Had the Scriptures been trans-

58 THE COLLECTED WORKS

lated, as literally as now, into the colloquial speech of the unlearned, and had the originals been thereafter inaccessible, only direct interposition of the Divine Power could have saved the whole edifice of Christianity from tumbling to ruin.

Max Muller distilled the results of a lifetime of study into two lines:

No Language without Reason.

No Reason without Language.

The person with a copious and obedient vocabulary and the will and power to apply it with precision thinks great thoughts. The mere glib talker—who may have a meagre vocabulary and no sense of discrimination in the use of words—is another kind of creature. A nation whose language is strong and rich and flexible and sweet—such as English was just before the devil invented dictionaries—has a noble literature and, compared with contemporary nations barren in speech, a superior morality. A word is a crystallized thought; good words are precious possessions, which nevertheless, like gold, may be mischievously used. The introduction of a

bad word, its preservation, the customary misuse of a good one—these are sins affecting the public welfare. The fight against faulty diction is a fight against insurgent barbarism—a fight for high thinking and right living—for art, science, power—in a word, civilization. A motor without mechanism; an impulse without a medium of transmission; a vitalizing thought with no means to impart it; a fertile mind with a barren vocabulary—than these nothing could be more impotent. Happily they are impossible. They are not even conceivable.

Conduct is of character, character is of thought, and thought is unspoken speech. We think in words; we can not think without them. Shallowness or obscurity of speech means shallowness or obscurity of thought. Barring a physical infirmity, an erring tongue denotes an erring brain. When I stumble in my speech I stumble in my thought. Those who have naturally the richest and most obedient vocabulary are also the wisest thinkers; there is little worth knowing but what they have thought. The most brutish savage is he who is most meagrely equipped

with words; fill him with words to the top of his gift and you would make him as wise as he is able to become.

The man who can neither write well nor talk well would have us believe that, like the taciturn parrot of the anecdote, he is "a devil to think." It is not so. Though such a man had read the Alexandrian library he would remain ignorant; though he had sat at the feet of Plato he would be still unwise. The gift of expression is the measure of mental capacity; its degree of cultivation is the exponent of intellectual power. One may choose not to utter one's mind—that is another matter; but if he choose he can. He can utter it all. His mind, not his heart; his thought, not his emotion. And if he do not sometimes choose to utter he will eventually cease to think. A mind without utterance is like a lake without an outlet: though fed with mountain springs and unfailing rivers, its waters do not long keep sweet.

Human speech is an imperfect instrument—imperfect by reason of its redundancy, imperfect by reason of its poverty. We have too many words for our meaning, too many meanings for our words. The effect is so con-

fusing and embarrassing that the ability to express our thoughts with force and accuracy is extremely rare. It is not a gift, but a gift and an accomplishment. It comes not altogether by nature, but is achieved by hard, technical study.

In illustration of the poverty of speech take the English word "literature." It means the art of writing and it means the things written—preferably in the former sense by him who has made it a study, almost universally in the latter by those who know nothing about it. Indeed, the most of these are unaware that it has another meaning, because unaware of the existence of the thing which in that sense it means. Tell them that literature, like painting, sculpture, music and architecture, is an art—the most difficult of arts—and you must expect an emphatic dissent. The denial not infrequently comes from persons of wide reading, even wide writing, for the popular writer commonly utters his ideas as, if he pursued the vocation for which he is better fitted, he would dump another kind of rubbish from another kind of cart—pull out the tailboard and let it go. The immortals have a different method.

62 THE COLLECTED WORKS

Among the minor trials of one who has a knowledge of the art of literature is the book of one who has not. It is a light affliction, for he need not read it. The worthy bungler's conversation about the books of others is a sharper disaster, for it can not always be evaded and must be courteously endured; and, goodness gracious! how comprehensively he does not know! How eagerly he points out the bottomless abyss of his ignorance and leaps into it! The *censor literarum* is perhaps the most widely distributed species known to zoology.

The ignorance of the reading public and the writing public concerning literary art is the eighth wonder of the world. Even its rudiments are to these two great classes a thing that is not. From neither the talk of the one nor the writing of the other would a student from Mars ever learn, for illustration, that a romance is not a novel; that poetry is a thing apart from the metrical form in which it is most acceptable; that an epigram is not a truth tersely stated—is, in fact, not altogether true; that fable is neither story nor anecdote; that the speech of an illiterate doing the best he knows how is another thing

than dialect; that prose has its prosody no less exacting than verse. The ready-made critic and the ready-made writer are two of a kind and each is good enough for the other. To both, writing is writing, and that is all there is of it. If we had two words for the two things now covered by the one word "literature" perhaps the benighted could be taught to distinguish between, not only the art and the product, but, eventually, the different kinds of the product itself. As it is, they are in much the same state of darkness as that of the Southern young woman before she went North and learned, to her astonishment, that the term "damned Yankee" was two words—she had never heard either without the other.

In literature, as in all art, manner is everything and matter nothing; I mean that matter, however important, has nothing to do with the *art* of literature; that is a thing apart. In literature it makes very little difference what you say, but a great deal how you say it. It is precisely this thing called style which determines and fixes the place of any written discourse; the thoughts may be the most interesting, the statements the most im-

portant, that it is possible to conceive; yet if they be not cast in the literary mold, the world can not be persuaded to accept the work as literature. What could be more important and striking than the matter of Darwin's books, or Spencer's? Does anyone think of Darwin and Spencer as men of letters? Their manner, too, is admirable for its purpose—to convince. Conviction, though, is not a literary purpose. What can depose Sterne from literature? Yet who says less than Sterne, or says it better?

It is so in painting. One man makes a great painting of a sheepcote; another, a bad one of Niagara. The difference is not in the subject—in that the Niagara man has all the advantage; it is in the style. Art—literary, graphic, or what you will—is not a matter of matter, but a matter of manner. It is not the What but the How. The master enchants when writing of a pebble on the beach; the bungler wearies us with a storm at sea. Let the dullard look to his theme and thought; the artist sets down what comes. He pickles it sweet with a salt savor of verbal felicity, and it charms like Apollo's lute.

ON READING NEW BOOKS

IT is hereby confessed too—nay, affirmed—that this our time is as likely to produce great literary work as any of the ages that have gone before. There is no reason to suppose that the modern mind is any whit inferior in creative power to the ancient, albeit the moderns have not, as the ancients had, “the first rifling of the beauties of nature.” For our images, our metaphors, our similes and what not we must go a bit further afield than Homer had to go. We can no longer—at least we no longer should, though many there be who do—say “as red as blood,” “as white as snow,” and so forth. Our predecessors harvested that crop and threshed it out before we had the bad luck to be born. But much that was closed to them is open to us, for still creation widens to man’s view.

No; the *laudatores temporis acti* are not to be trusted when they say that the days of great literature are past. At any time a supreme genius may rise anywhere on the lit-

erary horizon and, flaming in the sky, splendor the world with a new glory. But the readers of new books need not put on colored spectacles to protect their eyes. It is not they that will recognize him. They will not be able to distinguish him from the little luminaries whose advent they are always "hailing" as the dawn of a new and wonderful day. It is unlikely, indeed, that he will be recognized at all in his own day for what he is. It may be that when he "swims into our ken" we shall none of us eye the blue vault and bless the useful light, but swear that it is a malign and baleful beam. Nay, worse, he may never be recognized by posterity. Great work in letters has no inherent quality, no innate vitality, that will necessarily preserve it long enough to demand judgment from those qualified by time to consider it without such distractions as the circumstances and conditions under which it was produced. And only so can a true judgment be given. It is likely that more great writers have died and been forever forgotten than have had their fame bruited about the world. Ah, well, they must take their chances. I, for my part, am not going to read dozens of the very newest books annu-

ally lest I overlook a genius now and then. Dozens are large numbers when it is books that one is talking about. Probably not so many worth reading were written in either half of the Nineteenth Century.

The reader of new books is in the position of one who, having at hand a mine of precious metals, easy of working and by his utmost diligence inexhaustible, suffers it to lie untouched and goes prospecting on the chance of finding another as good. He may find one, though the odds are a thousand to one that he will not. If he does, he will find also that he did not need to be in a hurry about it. Every book that is worth reading is founded on something permanent in human nature or the constitution of things, and constructed on principles of art which are themselves eternal. Whether it is read in one decade or another—even in one century or another—is of no importance; its value and charm are unchanging and unchangeable. Reverting to my simile of the mine, a good book is located on the great mother-lode of human interest; whereas the work that immediately prospers in the praise of the multitude commonly taps some “pocket” in the country rock and the accidental deposit is soon exhausted.

68 THE COLLECTED WORKS

The world is full of great books in lettered languages. If any one has lived long enough, and read with sufficient assiduity, to have possessed his mind of all the literary treasures accessible to him; if he has mastered all the tongues in which are any masterworks of genius yet untranslated; if the ages have nothing more to offer him; if he has availed himself of the utmost advantages that he can derive from the infallible censorship of time and advice of the posterity which he calls his ancestors—let him commit himself to the blind guidance of chance, stand at the tail end of a modern press and devour as much of its daily output as he can. That will, at least, enable him to shine in a conversation; and the social *illuminati* whose achievements in that way are most admired will themselves assure you that such are the purpose and advantage of “literary culture.” And of all drawing-room authorities, he or she is most reverently esteemed who can most readily and accurately say what dullard wrote the latest and stupidest novel, but can not say why.

ALPHABÊTES AND BORDER RUF-
FIANS

I

IT is hoped that Divine Justice may find some suitable affliction for the malefactors who invent variations upon the letters of the alphabet of our fathers—our Roman fathers. Within the past thirty years our current literature has become a spectacle for the gods. The type-founder, worthy mechanic, has asserted himself with an overshadowing individuality, defacing with his monstrous creations and revivals every publication in the land. Everywhere secret, black and midnight wags are diligently studying the alphabet to see how many of the letters are susceptible to mutation into something new and strange. Some of the letters are more tractable than others: the O, for example, can be made as little as you please and set as far above the line as desired, with or without a flyspeck in the center or a dash (straight or curved) below. Why should one

think that O looks better when thrown out of relation to the other letters when Heaven has given him eyes to see that it does not?

Then there is the M—the poor M, who for his distinction as the biggest toad in the alphabetical puddle is subjected to so dreadful though necessary indignity in typescript—the wanton barbarity of his treatment by the type-founders makes one blush for civilization, or at least wish for it. There are two schools of M-sters; when their warfare is accomplished we shall know whether that letter is to figure henceforth as two sides of a triangle or three sides of a square. In A the ruffians have an easy victim; they can put his cross-bar up or down at will; it does not matter, so that it is put where it was not. For it must be understood that all these alterations are made with no thought of beauty: the sole purpose of the ruffians is to make the letters, as many as possible of them, different from what they were before. That is true generally, but not universally: in the titles of books and weekly newspapers, and on the covers of magazines, there is frequently an obvious revival, not merely of archaic forms, but of crude and primitive printing, as if from wooden blocks. Doubtless it is

beautiful, but it does not look so. In our time the reversionaries have so far prevailed against common sense that in several periodicals the long-waisted s is restored, and we have a renewal of the scandalous relations between the c and the t.

The most fantastic and grotesque of these reversions (happily it has not yet affected the text of our daily reading) is the restoration of the ancient form of U, which is now made a V again. This would seem to be bad enough, but it appears that it has not sated the passion for change; so the V also has again become a U! What advantage is got by the transposition those who make it have not condescended to explain. Altogether the unhappy man who conceives himself obliged to read the literature of the day—especially the part that shouts and screams in titles and catalogues, headlines, and so forth—may justly claim remission of punishment in the next world, so poignant are his sufferings in this.

II

Coincidentally in point of time with these indisposing pranks, came in, and has remained in, a companion-fad of the artists who il-

72 THE COLLECTED WORKS

illustrate newspapers, magazines and books. These probably well-meaning but most undesirable persons, who could be spared by even the most unsparing critic, are affected with a weakness for borders to pictures. By means of borders—borders rectangular, borders triangular, borders circular, borders omniform and nulliform they can put pictures into pictures, like cards in a loose pack, stick pictures through pictures, and so confuse, distract and bewilder the attention that it turns its back upon the display, occupying itself with the noble simplicity and naturalness of the wish that all artists were at the devil. Nor are they satisfied with all that: they must make pictures of pictures by showing an irrelevant background outside their insupportable borders; by representing their pictures as depending from hooks; nailed upon the walls; spitted on pins, and variously served right. And still they are not happy: the picture must, upon occasion, transgress its border—a mast, a steeple, or a tree thrust through and rejoicing in its escape; an ocean spilling over and taking to its heels as hard as ever it can hook it. The taste that accepts this fantastic nonsense is creature to the taste that supplies it; in an age and country having any sense of the serious-

ness of art the taste could not exist long enough to outlast its victim's examination on a charge of lunacy.

No picture should have a border; that has no use, no meaning, and whatever beauty is given to it the picture pays for through the nose. It is what may be called a contemporary survival: it stands for the frame of a detached picture—a picture on a wall. The frame is necessary for support and protection; but an illustration, like the female of the period, needs neither protection nor support, and the border would give none if it were needed. It is an impertinence without a mandate; its existence is due to unceasing suggestions flowing from the frames into heads where there is plenty of room.

III

Apropos of illustrations and illustrators, I should like to ask what is the merit or meaning of that peculiar interpretation of nature which consists in representing men and women with white clothing and black faces and hands. I do not say that it is not sufficiently realistic—that it is too conventional; I only “want to know.” I should like to know, too,

if in illustrating, say, a football match in Ujiji the gentlemen addicted to that method here would show the players in black clothing, with white faces and hands? Or in default of clothing would they be shown white all over? If anybody can endarken my lightness on this subject I shall be glad to hear from him. I am groping in a noonday of doubt and plunged in a gulf of white despair.

Possibly these pictures are called silhouettes—I have heard them called so. Possibly if they were silhouettes they would be acceptable, for the genius of a Kanewka may lift the spectator above such considerations as right and left in the matter of legs and arms. But they are not silhouettes; the faces and hands are in shadow, the clothing in light. The figures are like Tennyson's lotus eaters: "between the sun and moon"; the former has power upon the skin only, the latter upon the apparel. The spectator is supposed to be upon the same side as the moon. That is where the artist is. He draws the figures, the moon draws him, and I draw a veil over the affecting scene.

TO TRAIN A WRITER

THERE is a good deal of popular ignorance about writing; it is commonly thought that good writing comes of a natural gift and that without the gift the trick can not be turned. This is true of great writing, but not of good. Any one with good natural intelligence and a fair education can be taught to write well, as he can be taught to draw well, or play billiards well, or shoot a rifle well, and so forth; but to do any of these things greatly is another matter. If one can not do great work it is worth while to do good work and think it great.

I have had some small experience in teaching English composition, and some of my pupils are good enough to permit me to be rather proud of them. Some I have been able only to encourage, and a few will recall my efforts to profit them by dissuasion. I should not now think it worth while to teach a pupil to write merely well, but given one capable of writing greatly, and five years in

76 THE COLLECTED WORKS

which to train him, I should not permit him to put pen to paper for at least two of them—except to make notes. Those two years should be given to broadening and strengthening his mind, teaching him how to think and giving him something to think about—to sharpening his faculties of observation, dispelling his illusions and destroying his ideals. That would hurt: he would sometimes rebel, doubtless, and have to be subdued by a diet of bread and water and a poem on the return of our heroes from Santiago.

If I caught him reading a newly published book, save by way of penance, it would go hard with him. Of our modern education he should have enough to read the ancients: Plato, Aristotle, Marcus Aurelius, Seneca and that lot—custodians of most of what is worth knowing. He might retain what he could of the higher mathematics if he had been so prodigal of his time as to acquire any, and might learn enough of science to make him prefer poetry; but to learn from Euclid that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles, yet not to learn from Epictetus how to be a worthy guest at the table of the gods, would be accounted a breach of contract.

But chiefly this fortunate youth with the brilliant future should learn to take comprehensive views, hold large convictions and make wide generalizations. He should, for example, forget that he is an American and remember that he is a Man. He should be neither Christian, nor Jew, nor Buddhist, nor Mahometan, nor Snake Worshiper. To local standards of right and wrong he should be civilly indifferent. In the virtues, so-called, he should discern only the rough notes of a general expediency; in fixed moral principles only time-saving predecisions of cases not yet before the court of conscience. Happiness should disclose itself to his enlarging intelligence as the end and purpose of life; art and love as the only means to happiness. He should free himself of all doctrines, theories, etiquettes, politics, simplifying his life and mind, attaining clarity with breadth and unity with height. To him a continent should not seem wide, nor a century long. And it would be needful that he know and have an ever present consciousness that this is a world of fools and rogues, blind with superstition, tormented with envy, consumed with vanity, selfish, false, cruel, cursed with illusions—frothing mad!

We learn in suffering what we teach in song—and prose. I should pray that my young pupil would occasionally go wrong, experiencing the educational advantages of remorse; that he would dally with some of the more biting vices. I should be greatly obliged if Fortune would lay upon him, now and then, a heavy affliction. A bereavement or two, for example, would be welcome, although I should not care to have a hand in it. He must have joy, too—O, a measureless exuberance of joy; and hate, and fear, hope, despair and love—love inexhaustible, a permanent provision. He must be a sinner and in turn a saint, a hero, a wretch. Experiences and emotions—these are necessities of the literary life. To the great writer they are as indispensable as sun and air to the rose, or good, fat, edible vapors to toads. When my pupil should have had two years of this he would be permitted to try his 'prentice hand at a pig story in words of one syllable. And I should think it very kind and friendly if Mr. George Sylvester Vierick would consent to be the pig.

1899.

AS TO CARTOONING

I

I WISH that the American artists whose lot is cast in the pleasant domain of caricature would learn something of the charm of moderation and the strength of restraint. Their "cartoons" yell; one looks at them with one's fingers in one's ears.

Did you ever observe and consider the dragon in Chinese art? With what an awful ferocity it is endowed by its creator—the expanded mouth with its furniture of curling tongue and impossible teeth, its big, fiery eyes, scaly body, huge claws and spiny back! All the horrible qualities the artist knows he lavishes upon this pet of his imagination. The result is an animal which one rather wishes to meet and would not hesitate to cuff. Unrestricted exaggeration has defeated its own purpose and made ludicrous what was meant to be terrible. That is, the artist has lacked the strength of restraint. A true artist

80 THE COLLECTED WORKS

could so represent the common domestic bear, or the snake of the field, as to smite the spectator with a nameless dread. He could do so by merely giving to the creature's eye an expression of malevolence which would need no assistance from claw, fang or posture.

The American newspaper cartoonist errs in an infantile way similar to that of the Chinese; by intemperate exaggeration he fails of his effect. His men are not men at all, so it is impossible either to respect or detest them, or to feel toward them any sentiment whatever. As well try to evoke a feeling for or against a wooden Indian, a butcher's-block, or a young lady's favorite character in fiction. His deformed and distorted creations are entirely outside the range of human sympathy, antipathy, or interest. They are not even amusing. They are disgusting and, as in the case of foul names, the object of the disgust which they inspire is not the person vilified, but the person vilifying.

Perhaps I am not the average reader, but it is a fact that I frequently read an entire newspaper page of which one of these cartoons is the most conspicuous object, without once glancing at the picture's title or observing what it is all about. I have the same un-

conscious reluctance to see it that I have to see anything else offensive.

I once sat reading a Republican newspaper. The whole upper half of the page consisted of a cartoon by a well-known artist. It represented Mr. Bryan, the Democratic candidate for the Presidency, standing on his head in a crowd (which I think he would do if it would make him President, and I don't know that it would not) but I did not then observe it. The artist himself sat near by, narrowly watching me, which I did observe. A little while after I had laid down the paper he said carelessly: "O, by the way, what do you think of my cartoon of Bryan with his heels in the air?" And—Heaven help me!—I replied that I had been a week out of town and had not seen the newspapers!

A peculiarity of American caricature is that few of its "masters" know how to draw. They are like our great "humorists," who are nearly all men of little education and meagre reading. As soon as they have prospered, got a little polish and some knowledge of books, they cease to be "humorists."

One of the most popular of the "cartoonists" knows so little of anatomy that in most of his work the human arm is a fourth too

82 THE COLLECTED WORKS

short, and seems to be rapidly dwindling to a pimple; and so little of perspective that in a certain cartoon one of his figures was leaning indolently against a column about ten feet from where he stood.

A fashion has recently come in among the comic artists of getting great fun out of the lower forms of life. They have discovered and developed a mine of humor in the beasts and the birds, the reptiles, fishes and insects. Some of the things they make them say and do are really amusing. But here is where they all go wrong and spoil their work: they put upon these creatures some article of human attire—boots, a coat or a hat. They make them carry umbrellas and walking-sticks. They put a lightning rod on a bird's nest, a latch on a squirrel-hole in a tree, and supply a beehive with a stovepipe. Why? They don't know why; they have a vague feeling that incongruity is witty, or that to outfit an animal with human appurtenances brings it, somehow, closer to one's bosom and business. The effect is otherwise.

When you have drawn your cow with a skirt she has not become a woman, and is no longer a cow. She is nothing that a sane taste can feel an interest in. An animal, or

any living thing, in its natural state—is always interesting. Some animals we know to have the sense of humor and all probably have language; so in making them do and say funny things, even if their speech has to be translated into ours, there is nothing unnatural, incongruous or offensive. But a cat in a shirtwaist, a rabbit with a gun—ah, me!

Obviously it is futile to say anything to those “dragons of the prime” who draw the combination map-and-picture—the map whereon cities are represented by clusters of buildings, each cluster extending half way to the next. It would be useless to protest that these horrible things are neither useful as maps nor pleasing as pictures. They are—well, to put it quite plainly, they sicken. Sometimes the savages who draw them sketch-in a regiment or so of soldiers—this in “war-maps” of course—whose height is about five miles each, except that of the commander, which is ten. And if there is a bit of sea the villain who draws it will show us a ship two hundred miles long, commonly sailing up hill or down. It is useless to remonstrate against this kind of thing. The men guilty of it are little further advanced intellectually than the worthy cave-dweller

who has left us his masterpieces scratched on rocks and the shoulder blades of victims of his appetite—the illustrious inventor of the six-legged mammoth and the feathered pig.

II

When in the course of human events I shall have been duly instated as head of the art department of an American newspaper, a decent respect for the principles of my trade will compel me to convene my cartoonists and utter the hortatory remarks here following:

“Gentlemen, you will be pleased to understand some of the limitations of your art, for therein lies the secret of efficiency. To know and respect one’s limitations, not seeking to transcend them, but ever to occupy the entire area of activity which they bound—that is to accomplish all that it is given to man to do. Your limitations are of two kinds: those inconsiderable ones imposed by nature, and the less negligible ones for which you will have to thank the tyrant that has the honor to address you.

“Your first and highest duty, of course, is to afflict the Eminent Unworthy. To the service of that high purpose I invite you with

effusion, but shall limit you to a single method—ridicule. You may not do more than make them absurd. Happily that is the sharpest affliction that Heaven has given them the sensibility to feel. When one is conscious of being ridiculous one experiences an incomparable and immedicable woe. Ridicule is the capital punishment of the unwritten law.

“I shall not raise the question of your natural ability to make an offender hateful, but only say that it is not permitted to you to do so in this paper. The reason should be obvious: you can not make him hateful without making a hateful picture, and a paper with hateful pictures is a hateful paper. Some of you, I am desolated to point out, have at times sinned so grievously as to make the victim—or attempt to make him—not only hateful but offensive, not only offensive but loathsome. Result: hateful, offensive, loathsome cartoons, imparting their unpleasant character to the paper containing them; for the contents of a paper are the paper.

“And, after all, this folly fails of its purpose—does not make its subject offensive. An eminently unworthy person—a political ‘boss,’ a ‘king of finance,’ or a ‘gray wolf of the Senate’—is a man of normal appear-

86 THE COLLECTED WORKS

ance; his face, his figure, his postures, are those of the ordinary human being. In the attempt to make him offensive the caricaturist's art of exaggeration is carried to such an extreme as to remove the victim from the domain of human interest. The loathing inspired by the impossible creation is not transferred to the person so candidly misrepresented; the picture is made offensive, but its subject is untouched. As well try to hate a faulty triangle, a house upside down, a vacuum, or an abracadabra. Let there be surcease of so mischievous work; it is not desired that this paper shall be prosperous in spite of its artists, but partly because of them.

"True, to make a man ridiculous you must make a ridiculous picture, but a ridiculous picture is not displeasing. If well done, with only the needful, that is to say artistic, exaggeration, it is pleasing. We like to laugh, but we do not like—pardon me—to retch. The only person pleased by an offensive cartoon is its author; the only person pained by a ridiculous one is its victim."

1900.

THE S. P. W.

WILL not some Christian gentleman of leisure have the benevolence to organize The Society for the Protection of Writers?

Its work will be mainly educational; not much permanent good can be done, I fear, by assassination, though as an auxiliary means, that may be worthy of consideration. The public must be led to understand, each individual in his own way, that some part of a writer's time belongs to himself and has a certain value to him. If the experience of other writers equally ill known is the same as mine the sum of our wrongs is something solemn. Everybody, it would seem, feels at liberty to request a writer to do whatever the wild and wanton requester may wish to have done—to criticise (commend) a manuscript; send his photograph, or a copy of his latest book; write poetry in an album forwarded for the purpose and already well filled with unearthly sentiments by demons of the pit;

88 THE COLLECTED WORKS

set down a few rules for writing well, and so forth. It is God's truth that compliance with one-half of the "requests" made of me would leave me no time for my meals, and no meals for my time.

Of course I speak of strangers—persons without the shadow of a claim to my time and attention, and with very little to those of their heavenly Father. Indeed, they belong, as a rule, to a class that is more profited by escaping divine attention than by courting it: nothing should so fill them with consternation as a glance from the All-seeing Eye—though some of the finer and freer spirits of their bright band would think nothing of inviting the Recording Angel to forsake his accounts and scratch an appropriate sentiment on "the enclosed headstone."

When Mr. Rudyard Kipling once visited Montreal he gave orders at his hotel that he was not to be disturbed—whereby many worthy persons who called to "pay their respects" were sadly disappointed. One "prominent merchant," a "great admirer," took the trouble to introduce himself, and had the infelicitous fate to be informed by Mr. Kipling that he did not wish any new acquaintances—and sorrow perched upon that

man's prominent soul. To a club of "literary" folk and "artists" who "tendered him a reception" he did not deign a reply; and those whose hope construed his silence as assent were made acquainted with the taste of their own teeth. In short, Mr. Kipling seems to have acted in Montreal very much like a modest gentleman desiring to be let alone and having a gentleman's fine scorn of vulgarity and intrusion.

When, I wonder, will Americans—Canadian Americans and United States Americans—learn that their admiration of a man's work in letters or art gives them no right to occupy his time and lengthen the always intolerably long muster-roll of his acquaintance? One would think that so wholesome a lesson in manners as Dickens gave us during his first visit, and later in the *American Notes* and *Martin Chuzzlewit*, would suffice, and that for lack of students he would have no successor in the Chair of Deportment. But sycophancy, like hope, springs eternal in the human breast, and, crushed to earth, impudence like truth, will rise again, inviting a fresh humiliation. Well, as the homely proverb hath it, there is no great loss without some small gain—albeit the same usually accrues to

90 THE COLLECTED WORKS

the author of the loss. Montreal's Pen and Pencil Club having passed through the fire and been purified of its own respect, is now, by that privation and the affining stress of a common sorrow, fitted to affiliate with the Bohemian Club of San Francisco, which also knows the lift of the Kipling superior lip, and how he kipples.

Mr. Kipling's explanation that he did not desire any new acquaintances goes pretty nearly to the root of the matter. What man of sense does?—unless he is so ghastly unfortunate as to need them in his business. A man of brains has commonly a better use for his head than to make it serve as a rogues' gallery for an interminable succession of mental portraits, each of which he must be prepared to outfit with its appropriate name on demand. One can not, of course, and none but a fool would wish to, go through life without now and again making an acquaintance, even a friendship, as circumstances, civility and character may determine. Even chance may without absolutely uniform disaster play a part in such matters, though, as a rule, persons in whose lives accidental meetings entail lasting social relations are not particularly agreeable to meet. Your man of sense cares to know

those whom he daily meets under such circumstances as would make it awkward if he did not know them; and he is accessible to all good souls whose wish to know him is supplemented by the frankness to ask an introduction and the civility to obtain his assent. It is thus that he will himself approach those whom he wishes to know, and in some cases those whom he merely suspects of the wish to know him. As to that invention of the devil, the purposeless and meaningless "chance introduction," it is the hatefulest thing in all the wild welter of social irritants. As a claim to acquaintance it has about the same validity as had, in the case of Kipling, the fact that Montreal's "prominent merchant" was a "great admirer."

If a man, like a red worm, could be multiplied by section he might perhaps undertake to know all whom the irritating freedom of American manners permits to be introduced to him, and, if he is a distinguished writer, all who "greatly admire" him. At least if they were properly brigaded he might undertake to commit to his multiplied memory the names or numerals of the several brigades. Even then it should be understood that failure through preoccupation with his own affairs

92 THE COLLECTED WORKS

should not be counted against him as proof of pride and an evil disposition. Some allowance should be made, too, for the probability that a man of letters may be unfitted for prodigious feats of recollection by the necessity of preserving some part of his time for use in—well, for example, in letters. As to “receptions,” “banquets,” and so forth, “tendered” him, and “calls” “paid” him by strangers not of his profession, unless he is a literary impostor he will not accept the hospitality, nor, unless he is a social coward, submit to the intrusion. He knows that beneath these dreary and dispiriting “attentions” are motives transcending in ugliness a tangle of snakes under a warm rock.

There are other reasons why men of letters are not usually hot to make acquaintances. A good writer is a man of thought, for good writing, whatever else it may be, is, first of all, clear thinking. However much or little of his actual opinions he may choose to put into his work, he necessarily, as a man of thought, has convictions not commonly entertained by “persons whom one meets”—when one must. He is likely to be a dissenter from the established order of things—to hold in scant esteem the institutions, faiths, laws,

customs, habits, morals and manners that are the natural outgrowth and expression of our barbarous race; the enactments of God's governing majority, the rogues and fools. To utter his views in conversation with Philistines and Prudes is to smite them sick with dismay and fill them topful of resentment and antagonism; to incite a contention in which the appurtenant stalled ox itself is imperiled in the bones of it. Yet in making the acquaintance of even a fairly educated person not a vulgarian and having no outward and visible signs of an inner disgrace the chances are ten to one that you are meeting a Philistine and prude by whom natural conduct and rational convictions are accounted immoral, and with whom conversation outside the worn ways of commonplace and platitude is impossible. If it is a woman she will probably insult you, all unconsciously, in a thousand and fifty ways by savage scruples inherited from a long line of pithecan ancestresses eared to hear in the rustle of every leaf the tonguefall of the arboreal Mrs. Grundy. If it is a man there should be no needless delay in insulting *him*.

Another imminent peril to him who travels the hard road of letters lies in the mad desire and iron resolution of his new acquaintances

94 THE COLLECTED WORKS

to talk about his work, with, of course, imperfect knowledge, understanding and discretion. This if he will not permit he is accounted proud; if he will, vain. Poor Hawthorne's experience with the worthy person who thought it the proper thing to make a graceful reference to his book, "The Red Letter A," is typical and the record of that dreadful encounter comes home to every author's bosom and business with a peculiar personal interest.

PORTRAITS OF ELDERLY
AUTHORS

IF by good or much writing a modest old man have the misfortune to incur the curiosity of the public regarding his personal appearance, how shall he gratify it—and gratified it will somehow be—with the least distress to himself? Every public writer is familiar with the demand, from editor or publisher, “Please send photograph.” Of course he may easily decline, but also, alas! editor or publisher may easily decline the work for embellishment or advertisement of which the photograph was sought. So what can the poor man do? And what photograph shall he send—that of yesteryear, or that of a decade or two ago? Concerning this singularly solemn matter I venture to quote from a letter of one who conducts an editorium:

“One sees the printed counterfeit of a dashing young chap whom all know as the distinguished author of ‘The Bean Pot,’ which, it

is true, appeared twenty years ago. But the portrait is the familiar one always used by publishers to herald later books by the same author. One day the author himself calls. You have always thought of him as having a smooth, high brow topped with a fine cluster of coal-black curls, and the devil in his eyes. When this wrinkled, bald, and squeaky old man tells you that he is the author of 'The Bean Pot' you suffer a shock. All your self-restraint is invoked to inhibit contumelious word and inhospitable act."

True, O king, but there is more to the matter. Every writer that is fore and fit cherishes a natural expectation of being known to posterity. If that hope is fulfilled he will be known to posterity by his last portrait. Who knows Bryant, Longfellow, Whittier, Holmes or Whitman as other than a venerable ruin? Who has in mind a middle-aged Hugo, or a young Goethe? It is with an effort that we grasp the fact that all these excellent gentlemen of letters were not born old. They were merely indiscreet; they sat for their portraits when they could no longer stand. By the happy mischance of early death, Byron, Shelley, Keats and Poe escaped the caricaturing of the years, and can snap their

finger-bones at Age, the merciless cartoonist.

The portrait of twenty years ago no more faultily represents the old man as he is than that of yesterday represents him as he was. Either is false to some period of his life, and he may reasonably enough prefer that posterity shall know how he looked in his prime, rather than that his contemporaries shall know how he looked in his decay. It may be that it was in his prime that he did the characteristic work that begot the desire to know him.

With what portrait, then, shall one well stricken in years meet the contemporary demand? Perhaps it is best, and not unfair, to supply it with one made in one's prime, conscientiously and conspicuously inscribed with its date—and that is what I have usually done myself. But I grieve to observe that the date is, as a rule, ingeniously effaced in the reproduction. But what does posterity find that is peculiarly pleasing in the portrait of a patient in the last stage of his fatal disorder?

WIT AND HUMOR

IF without the faculty of observation one could acquire a thorough knowledge of literature, the *art* of literature, one would be astonished to learn "by report divine" how few professional writers can distinguish between one kind of writing and another. The difference between description and narration, that between a thought and a feeling, between poetry and verse, and so forth—all this is commonly imperfectly understood, even by most of those who work fairly well by intuition.

The ignorance of this sort that is most general is that of the distinction between wit and humor, albeit a thousand times expounded by impartial observers having neither. Now, it will be found that, as a rule, a shoemaker knows calfskin from sole-leather and a blacksmith can tell you wherein forging a clevis differs from shoeing a horse. He will tell you that it is his business to know such things, so he knows them. Equally and manifestly

it is a writer's business to know the difference between one kind of writing and another kind, but to writers generally that advantage seems to be denied: they deny it to themselves.

I was once asked by a rather famous author why we laugh at wit. I replied: "We don't—at least those of us who understand it do not." Wit may make us smile, or make us wince, but laughter—that is the cheaper price that we pay for an inferior entertainment, namely, humor. There are persons who will laugh at anything at which they think they are expected to laugh. Having been taught that anything funny is witty, these benighted persons naturally think that anything witty is funny.

Who but a clown would laugh at the maxims of Rochefoucauld, which are as witty as anything written? Take, for example, this hackneyed epigram: "There is something in the misfortunes of our friends which we find not entirely displeasing"—I translate from memory. It is an indictment of the whole human race; not altogether true and therefore not altogether dull, with just enough of audacity to startle and just enough of paradox to charm, profoundly wise, as bleak as steel—

100 THE COLLECTED WORKS

a piece of ideal wit, as admirable as a well cut grave or the headsman's precision of stroke, and about as funny.

[Take Rabelais' saying that an empty stomach has no ears. How pitilessly it displays the primitive beast alurk in us all and moved to activity by our elemental disorders, such as the daily stress of hunger! Who could laugh at the horrible disclosure, yet who forbear to smile approval of the deftness with which the animal is unjungled?

In a matter of this kind it is easier to illustrate than to define. Humor (which is not inconsistent with pathos, so nearly allied are laughter and tears) is Charles Dickens; wit is Alexander Pope. Humor is Dogberry; wit is Mercutio. Humor is "Artemus Ward," "John Phoenix," "Josh Billings," "Petroleum V. Nasby," "Orpheus C. Kerr," "Bill" Nye, "Mark Twain"—their name is legion; for wit we must brave the perils of the deep: it is "made in France" and hardly bears transportation. Nearly all Americans are humorous; if any are born witty, Heaven help them to emigrate! You shall not meet an American and talk with him two minutes but he will say something humorous; in ten

days he will say nothing witty; and if he did, your own, O most witty of all possible readers, would be the only ear that would give it recognition. Humor is tolerant, tender; its ridicule caresses. Wit stabs, begs pardon—and turns the weapon in the wound. Humor is a sweet wine, wit a dry; we know which is preferred by the connoisseur. They may be mixed, forming an acceptable blend. Even Dickens could on rare occasions blend them, as when he says of some solemn ass that his ears have reached a rumor.

My conviction is that while wit is a universal tongue (which few, however, can speak) humor is everywhere a *patois* not “understood of the people” over the province border. The best part of it—its “essential spirit and uncarnate self,” is indigenous, and will not flourish in a foreign soil. The humor of one race is in some degree unintelligible to another race, and even in transit between two branches of the same race loses something of its flavor. To the American mind, for example, nothing can be more dreary and dejecting than an English comic paper; yet there is no reason to doubt that *Punch* and *Judy* and the rest of them have

102 THE COLLECTED WORKS

done much to dispel the gloom of the Englishman's brumous environment and make him realize his relationship to Man.

It may be urged that the great English humorists are as much read in this country as in their own; that Dickens, for example, has long "ruled as his demesne" the country which had the unhappiness to kindle the fires of contempt in him and Rudyard Kipling; that "the excellent Mr. Twain" has a large following beyond the Atlantic. This is true enough, but I am convinced that while the American enjoys his Dickens with sincerity, the gladness of his soul is a tempered emotion compared with that which riots in the immortal part of John Bull when that singular instrument feels the touch of the same master. That a jest of Mark Twain ever got itself all inside the four corners of an English understanding is a proposition not lightly to be accepted without hearing counsel.

1903.

WORD CHANGES AND SLANG

THAT respectable words lose caste, becoming the yellow dogs and very lepers of language, is a familiar fact hospitable to abundant illustration. One of these words has just fallen from my pen; fifty or a hundred years from now it will be impossible, probably, for any writer having a decent regard to the value of words to use the word "respectable" of anything truly meriting respect. For the past half-century it has been taking on a new and opprobrious character. Already the type of the "respectable" man, for example, is the prosperous, wool-witted Philistine, who complacently interlocks his fat fingers under the overhang of his stomach, and surveying the world from the eminence of his own esteem, tries vainly to imagine what it would be without him.

The word "respectable" is indubitably doomed: etymology can not save it, any more than it could save the word "miscreant," which means by derivation, as at one time it

104 THE COLLECTED WORKS

meant actually, infidel, unbeliever. In its present abasement we may hear a faint, far whisper of the old, old days of religious intolerance. It stands in modern speech a verbal monument to the *odium theologicum* reposing beneath in the sure and certain hope of a blessed resurrection.

A half-century ago the word "awful" was plumped into the mire of slang, where it has weltered ever since, without actual immersion, but apparently with no hope of extrication. The writer who would use it to-day in a serious sense has need to be well assured of his hold upon the reader's mood. It may perchance whisk that person away from the sublime to the ridiculous, with the neat-handed nimbleness of Satan snatching a soul from the straight and narrow way, to send it spinning aslant into the red-and-black billows of everlasting damnation!

There are transformations of a contrary sort—promotions and elevations of words, as from slang to poetry. Between the extremes of speech which are the extremes of thought, for speech is thought—between the upper and the lower deep, the heaven and the earth, is a Jacob's-ladder which these winged messengers of mind ascend and descend.

Grave advocacy of slang is not lacking: Professor Manley, of Harvard, is afield in defence of it. Some slang, he justly says, is "strong and poetical." It is "strong" because graphic and vivid, "poetical" because metaphorical; for the life and soul of poetry is metaphor.

Professor Manley thinks that the story of the Prodigal Son could have been better told this way:

The world gave him the marble heart, but his father extended the glad hand.

Yes, if those phrases had then been first used professors of literature might, as he suggests, be now expatiating on the beautiful simplicity of the diction and bewailing the inferiority of modern speech. But that is no defence of slang. It would not have been slang, any more than avowed or manifest quotations from the Scriptures as we have them are slang.

Professor Manley is especially charmed with the phrase "bats in his belfry," and would indubitably substitute it for "possessed of a devil," the Scriptural diagnosis of insanity. I don't think the good man meant to be

106 THE COLLECTED WORKS

irreverent, but I should not care for his Revised Edition.

Somewhat more than a generation ago John Camden Hotten, of London, a publisher of "rare and curious books," put out a slang dictionary. Its editor-in-chief was that accomplished scholar, George Augustus Sala. It was afterward revised by Henry Sampson, famous later as an authority in matters of sport, to whom I gave such assistance as my little learning and no sportsmanship permitted. The volume was a thick one, but contained little that in this country and period we know (and suffer) as "slang." Slang, as the word was then used, is defined in the *Century Dictionary* thus: "The cant words or jargon used by thieves, peddlers, beggars, and the vagabond classes generally."

To-day we mean by it something different and more offensive. It is no longer the *argot* of criminals and semi-criminals, "whom one does not meet," and whose distance—when they keep it—lends a certain enchantment to the ear, but the intolerable diction of more or less worthy persons who obey all laws but those of taste. In its present generally accepted meaning the word is thus defined by the authority already quoted: "Colloquial words and phrases which have originated in

the cant or rude speech of the vagabond or unlettered classes, or, belonging in form to standard speech, have acquired or have had given them restricted, capricious, or extravagantly metaphorical meanings, and are regarded as vulgar or inelegant."

It is not altogether comprehensible how a sane intelligence can choose to utter itself in that kind of speech, yet speech of that kind seems almost to be driving good English out of popular use. Among large classes of our countrymen, it is held in so high esteem that whole books of it are put upon the market with profit to author and publisher. One of the most successful of these, reprinted from many of our leading newspapers, is called, I think, *Fables in Slang*—containing, by the way, nothing that resembles a fable. This unspeakable stuff made its author rich, and naturally he "syndicated" a second series of the same. Another was entitled *Love Sonnets of a Hoodlum*, and contained not a line of clean English. And it is hardly an exaggeration to say that in this country the writing of humorous and satirical verse is a lost art; slang has taken the place of wit; the jest that smacks not of the slum finds no prosperity in any ear.

Slang has as many hateful qualities as a

108 THE COLLECTED WORKS

dog bad habits, but its essential vice is its hideous lack of originality; for until a word or phrase is common property it is not slang. Wherein, then, is the sense or humor of repeating it? The dullest dunce in the world may have an alert and obedient memory for current locutions. For skill in the use of slang no other mental equipment is required. However apt and picturesque a particular expression may be, the wit of it is his only who invented and first used it: in all others its use is forbidden by the commandment "Thou shalt not steal." A self-respecting writer would no more parrot a felicitous saying of unknown origin and popular currency than he would plagiarize a lively sentiment from Catullus or an epigram from Pope.

THE RAVAGES OF SHAKSPEARITIS

A FAMOUS author says that there is some kind of immoral emanation from the horse, and that it affects the character of every one who has much to do with the animal. I suppose it is something like that which suspires from the earth that is thrown out in digging a canal. Perhaps it is possible to construct a short and shallow waterway without stirring up enough of this badness to corrupt "all those in authority" along the line of it, but if the enterprise is of magnitude, like the Suez or the Panama project, results most disastrous to the morals of all engaged in the work, excepting those who do it, will certainly ensue, as we may soon have the happiness to observe.

A similar phenomenon is seen in the case of Shakspeare, whose resemblance to a horse and a canal has not, I flatter myself, been heretofore pointed out. The subtle suspiration from the work of the great dramatist,

110 THE COLLECTED WORKS

however, attacks, not the morals, but the intellect. It does not prostrate the sense of right and wrong, except in so far as this is dependent on mental health; it simply lays waste the judgment by dispersing the faculties, as the shadow of a hawk squanders a flock of feeding pigeons. Some time we shall perhaps have an English-speaking critic who will be immune to Shakspearitis, but as yet Heaven has not seen fit to "raise him up." And when we have him his inaccessibility to the infection will do him no good, for we shall indubitably put him to death.

The temptation to these reflections is supplied by looking into Mr. Arlo Bates's book, *Talks on Writing English*, where I find this passage quoted from Jeffrey:

"Everything in him (Shakspeare) is in unmeasured abundance and unequaled perfection—but everything so balanced and kept in subordination as not to jostle or disturb or take the place of another. The most exquisite poetical conceptions, images and descriptions are given with such brevity and introduced with such skill as merely to adorn without loading the sense they accompany. . . . All his excellences, like those of Nature herself, are thrown out together; and, instead of interfering with, support and recommend each other."

This is so fine as to be mostly false. It is

true that Shakspeare throws out his excellences in unmeasured abundance and all together; and nothing else in this passage is true. His poetical conceptions, images and descriptions are not "given" at all; they are "turned loose." They came from his brain like a swarm of bees. They race out, as shouting children from a country school. They distract, stun, confuse. So disorderly an imagination has never itself been imagined. Shakspeare had no sense of proportion, no care for the strength of restraint, no art of saying just enough, no art of any kind. He flung about him his enormous and incalculable wealth of jewels with the prodigal profusion of a drunken youth mad with the lust of spending. Only the magnificence and value of the jewels could blind us to the barbarian method of distribution. They dazzle the mind and confound all the criteria of the judgment. Small wonder that the incomparable Voltaire, French, artistic in every fiber and trained in the severe dignities of Grecian art, called this lawless and irresponsible spendthrift a drunken savage.

Of no cultivated Frenchman is the judgment on Shakspeare much milder; the man's "art," his "precision," his "perfection"—

112 THE COLLECTED WORKS

these are creations of our Teutonic imaginations, heritages of the time when in the rush-strewn baronial hall our ancestors surfeited themselves on oxen roasted whole and drank to insensibility out of wooden flagons holding a gallon each.

In literature, as in all else—in work, in love, in trade, in every kind of action or acquisition the Germanic nations are gluttons and drunkards. We want everything, as we want our food and drink, in savage profusion. And, by the same token, we rule the world.

1903.

ENGLAND'S LAUREATE

DOUTBLES there are competent critics of poetry in this country, but it is Mr. Alfred Austin's luck not to have drawn their attention.

Mr. Austin is not a great poet, but he is a poet. The head and front of his offending seems to be that he is a lesser poet than his predecessor—his immediate predecessor—for his austere critic will hardly affirm his inferiority to the illustrious Nahum Tate. Nor is Mr. Austin the equal by much of Mr. Swinburne, who as Poet Laureate was impossible—or at least highly improbable. If he had been offered the honor Mr. Swinburne would very likely have knocked off the Prime Minister's hat and jumped upon it. He is of a singularly facetious turn of mind, is Mr. Swinburne, and has to be approached with an orange in each hand.

Below Swinburne the differences in mental stature among British poets are inconsiderable; none is much taller than another, though

114 THE COLLECTED WORKS

Henley only could have written the great lines
beginning,

Out of the dark that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul—

and he is not likely to do anything like that
again; on that proposition

You your existence might put to the hazard and turn of
a wager.

I wonder how many of the merry gentlemen who find a pleasure in making mouths at Mr. Austin for what he does and doesn't do have ever read, or reading, have understood, his sonnet on

LOVE'S BLINDNESS.

Now do I know that Love is blind, for I
Can see no beauty on this beauteous earth,
No life, no light, no hopefulness, no mirth,
Pleasure nor purpose, when thou art not nigh.
Thy absence exiles sunshine from the sky,
Seres Spring's maturity, checks Summer's birth,
Leaves linnet's pipe as sad as plover's cry,
And makes me in abundance find but dearth.

But when thy feet flutter the dark, and thou
 With orient eyes dawnest on my distress,
 Suddenly sings a bird on every bough,
 The heavens expand, the earth grows less and less,
 The ground is buoyant as the ether now,
 And all looks lovely in thy loveliness.

The influence of Shakspeare is altogether too apparent in this, and it has as many faults as merits; but it is admirable work, nevertheless. To a poet only come such conceptions as "orient eyes" and feet that "flutter the dark."

Here is another sonnet in which the thought, quite as natural, is less obvious. In some of his best work Mr. Austin runs rather to love (a great fault, madam) and this is called

LOVE'S WISDOM.

Now on the summit of Love's topmost peak
 Kiss we and part; no further can we go;
 And better death than we from high to low
 Should dwindle, and decline from strong to weak.
 We have found all, there is no more to seek;
 All we have proved, no more is there to know;
 And Time can only tutor us to eke
 Out rapture's warmth with custom's afterglow.
 We cannot keep at such a height as this;
 For even straining souls like ours inhale

116 THE COLLECTED WORKS

But once in life so rarefied a bliss.

What if we lingered till love's breath should fail!
Heaven of my earth! one more celestial kiss,
Then down by separate pathways to the vale.

Will the merry Pikes of the Lower Mississippi littoral and the gamboling whalebackers of the Duluth hinterland be pleased to say what is laughable in all this?

It is not to be denied that Mr. Austin has written a good deal of "mighty poor stuff," but I humbly submit that a writer is not to be judged by his poorest work, but by his best,—as an athlete is rated, not by the least weight that he has lifted, but by the greatest—not by his nearest cast of the discus, but by his farthest. Surely a poet, as well as a race-horse, is entitled to the benefit of his "record performance."

1903.

HALL CAINE ON HALL CAINING

MR. HALL CAINE once took the trouble to explain that he put in three years of hard work on his novel, *The Christian*, rewriting it many times and submitting the several and various parts of the work to experts. One kind of expert he failed to consult—a person having some knowledge of the English language. Amongst other insupportable characteristics the very first sentence in the book contains twelve prepositions and several clashing relatives and concludes with a sequence of four dactyls! The first sentence is as far as I have gone into the book, of which I know only that the manuscript was sold for a considerable fortune and that by many thousands of my fellow-creatures it is regarded as a distinctly immortal work than the immortal work of the week immediately preceding the date of its publication. Of Mr. Caine himself I know a little more: for example, that if he were cast away on an island

118 THE COLLECTED WORKS

never before seen by a white man, in a few months every native would have a brand-new novel and Mr. Caine all the cowry-shells in the island.

Following a well-established precedent, he was good enough also to impart the secret of his success as a writer of "best-selling" books—novels, of course. The secret is genius. That seems simple enough and easy enough, but I submit that it was known before. Every author of a popular novel has been entirely conscious of his genius and the reviewers have known it as well as he. Nevertheless, it is always pleasing to find a workman who not only does not quarrel with his tools, but exhibits them with pride and affection, for we know then that he is a good workman, or—which means much the same thing—gets a good price for his product. Mr. Caine gets as good a price as any and is therefore as fit as any to expound his methods to the curious.

For it should be said that Mr. Caine does not hold that genius—even such genius as his—will produce so great work as his without some assistance from industry; one must take the trouble to write or dictate the great thoughts that genius inspires. One can not

do this without some degree of application to the homely task. Indeed, Mr. Caine explains that he writes his novels twice before he permits us to read them once. One is glad to know that; it shows that, like the country editor, whose burning office attracted a large and intelligent class of spectators, he "strives to please." He took fourteen months to write *The Eternal City*. That was most commendable, for with him time is money, but his patient diligence was equaled by that of a man that I know, who took fourteen months to read it.

Not only does Mr. Caine work slowly and surely; he advises lesser mortals to do so. "Write only when in the humor," he says. This is good advice to any man, of whatever degree of genius, who is ambitious to turn out a "best seller," but better advice would be: Don't write at all. There are less fame in that, less profit and less taking of one's self seriously; but there must be a feeling of greater security regarding the next world; for the author of a "best seller" is so conspicuous a figure in this world that he may be very sure that God sees him.

"Some people," says Mr. Caine, meaning some persons, doubtless—he writes in Best-

sellerese—"say that they can work best when they hurry most, but it is not the case with me, and I feel that inspiration does not come to the hurried mind so readily as it does when one is able to ponder deeply and shape one's thoughts into some truly perfected form."

That is an impressive picture. One can almost see Mr. Caine, sitting at his table, head in hand, pondering profoundly on his inspiration and shaping his thoughts into that truly perfected form demanded by his exacting market. This really great man, with chestnuts in his lap, arointing the designing witch of spontaneity who would abstract them, is a spectacle that will linger long in his own memory. It is one of the most pleasing revelations of self that can be found in the literature of how to do it. Probably it will have the distinction of surviving all Mr. Caine's other work by as much as six months. If done into bronze by a competent sculptor it may outlast even Mr. Caine himself, delighting and instructing an entire generation of Indiana novelists, the best in the world. Of course it is "on the cards" that he who has given us this solemn picture of himself in the veritable act of literary parturition may "whack up" something even better.

He is not so very old, and in the years remaining to him (may they be many and prosperous) he may produce something so incomparably popular that even the greatest of his previous work will be, in the luminous French of John Phoenix, "*frappé parfaitement froid!*" Indeed, Mr. Caine himself discerns that possibility very clearly. He says: "I do not believe I have yet produced my best work"—best selling work—"by any means." It is to be hoped that he has not: yet it is also to be regretted that he has had the cruelty to add a new terror to death by saying so. To one engaged in dying, the thought of what he may be missing by leaving this vale of tears before Mr. Caine has written his *Eternalest City* must generate the wrench and stress of an added pang. It would have been kinder to make that forecast to his publisher only. Even *in articulo mortis* (if he have the bad luck to die first) that gentleman's tantalizing vision of an unattainable earthly joy will come with enough of healing in its wings partly to salve the smart: coupled with the thought of what he will miss will come the consciousness of what he will not have to pay for it.

VISIONS OF THE NIGHT

I HOLD the belief that the Gift of Dreams is a valuable literary endowment—that if by some art not now understood the elusive fancies that it supplies could be caught and fixed and made to serve we should have a literature “exceeding fair.” In captivity and domestication the gift could doubtless be wonderfully improved, as animals bred to service acquire new capacities and powers. By taming our dreams we shall double our working hours and our most fruitful labor will be done in sleep. Even as matters are, Dreamland is a tributary province, as witness “Kubla Khan.”

What is a dream? A loose and lawless collocation of memories—a disorderly succession of matters once present in the waking consciousness. It is a resurrection of the dead, pell-mell—ancient and modern, the just and the unjust—springing from their cracked tombs, each “in his habit as he lived,” press-

ing forward confusedly to have an audience of the Master of the Revel, and snatching one another's garments as they run. Master? No; he has abdicated his authority and they have their will of him; his own is dead and does not rise with the rest. His judgment, too, is gone, and with it the capacity to be surprised. Pained he may be and pleased, terrified and charmed, but wonder he can not feel. The monstrous, the preposterous, the unnatural—these all are simple, right and reasonable. The ludicrous does not amuse, nor the impossible amaze. The dreamer is your only true poet; he is "of imagination all compact."

Imagination is merely memory. Try to imagine something that you have never observed, experienced, heard of or read about. Try to conceive an animal, for example, without body, head, limbs or tail—a house without walls or roof. But, when awake, having assistance of will and judgment, we can somewhat control and direct; we can pick and choose from memory's store, taking that which serves, excluding, though sometimes with difficulty, what is not to the purpose; asleep, our fancies "inherit us." They come so grouped, so blended and compounded the

one with another, so wrought of one another's elements, that the whole seems new; but the old familiar units of conception are there, and none beside. Waking or sleeping, we get from imagination nothing new but new adjustments: "the stuff that dreams are made on" has been gathered by the physical senses and stored in memory, as squirrels hoard nuts. But one, at least, of the senses contributes nothing to the fabric of the dream: no one ever dreamed an odor. Sight, hearing, feeling, possibly taste, are all workers, making provision for our nightly entertainment; but Sleep is without a nose. It surprises that those keen observers, the ancient poets, did not so describe the drowsy god, and that their obedient servants, the ancient sculptors, did not so represent him. Perhaps these latter worthies, working for posterity, reasoned that time and mischance would inevitably revise their work in this regard, conforming it to the facts of nature.

Who can so relate a dream that it shall seem one? No poet has so light a touch. As well try to write the music of an Æolian harp. There is a familiar species of the genus Bore (*Penetrator intolerabilis*) who having read a story—perhaps by some master of style—is

at the pains elaborately to expound its plot for your edification and delight; then thinks, good soul, that now you need not read it. "Under substantially similar circumstances and conditions" (as the interstate commerce law hath it) I should not be guilty of the like offence; but I purpose herein to set forth the plots of certain dreams of my own, the "circumstances and conditions" being, as I conceive, dissimilar in this, that the dreams themselves are not accessible to the reader. In endeavoring to make record of their poorer part I do not indulge the hope of a higher success. I have no salt to put upon the tail of a dream's elusive spirit.

I was walking at dusk through a great forest of unfamiliar trees. Whence and whither I did not know. I had a sense of the vast extent of the wood, a consciousness that I was the only living thing in it. I was obsessed by some awful spell in expiation of a forgotten crime committed, as I vaguely surmised, against the sunrise. Mechanically and without hope, I moved under the arms of the giant trees along a narrow trail penetrating the haunted solitudes of the forest. I came at length to a brook that flowed darkly and sluggishly across my path, and saw that

126 THE COLLECTED WORKS

it was blood. Turning to the right, I followed it up a considerable distance, and soon came to a small circular opening in the forest, filled with a dim, unreal light, by which I saw in the center of the opening a deep tank of white marble. It was filled with blood, and the stream that I had followed up was its outlet. All round the tank, between it and the enclosing forest—a space of perhaps ten feet in breadth, paved with immense slabs of marble—were dead bodies of men—a score; though I did not count them I knew that the number had some significant and portentous relation to my crime. Possibly they marked the time, in centuries, since I had committed it. I only recognized the fitness of the number, and knew it without counting. The bodies were naked and arranged symmetrically around the central tank, radiating from it like spokes of a wheel. The feet were outward, the heads hanging over the edge of the tank. Each lay upon its back, its throat cut, blood slowly dripping from the wound. I looked on all this unmoved. It was a natural and necessary result of my offence, and did not affect me; but there was something that filled me with apprehension and terror—a monstrous pulsation, beating

with a slow, inevitable recurrence. I do not know which of the senses it addressed, or if it made its way to the consciousness through some avenue unknown to science and experience. The pitiless regularity of this vast rhythm was maddening. I was conscious that it pervaded the entire forest, and was a manifestation of some gigantic and implacable malevolence.

Of this dream I have no further recollection. Probably, overcome by a terror which doubtless had its origin in the discomfort of an impeded circulation, I cried out and was awakened by the sound of my own voice.

The dream whose skeleton I shall now present occurred in my early youth. I could not have been more than sixteen. I am considerably more now, yet I recall the incidents as vividly as when the vision was "of an hour's age" and I lay cowering beneath the bed-covering and trembling with terror from the memory.

I was alone on a boundless level in the night—in my bad dreams I am always alone and it is usually night. No trees were anywhere in sight, no habitations of men, no streams nor hills. The earth seemed to be covered with a short, coarse vegetation that

128 THE COLLECTED WORKS

was black and stubbly, as if the plain had been swept by fire. My way was broken here and there as I went forward with I know not what purpose by small pools of water occupying shallow depressions, as if the fire had been succeeded by rain. These pools were on every side, and kept vanishing and appearing again, as heavy dark clouds drove athwart those parts of the sky which they reflected, and passing on disclosed again the steely glitter of the stars, in whose cold light the waters shone with a black luster. My course lay toward the west, where low along the horizon burned a crimson light beneath long strips of cloud, giving that effect of measureless distance that I have since learned to look for in Doré's pictures, where every touch of his hand has laid a portent and a curse. As I moved I saw outlined against this uncanny background a silhouette of battlements and towers which, expanding with every mile of my journey, grew at last to an unthinkable height and breadth, till the building subtended a wide angle of vision, yet seemed no nearer than before. Heartless and hopeless I struggled on over the blasted and forbidding plain, and still the mighty structure grew until I could no longer compass it with

a look, and its towers shut out the stars directly overhead; then I passed in at an open portal, between columns of cyclopean masonry whose single stones were larger than my father's house.

Within all was vacancy; everything was coated with the dust of desertion. A dim light—the lawless light of dreams, sufficient unto itself—enabled me to pass from corridor to corridor, and from room to room, every door yielding to my hand. In the rooms it was a long walk from wall to wall; of no corridor did I ever reach an end. My footfalls gave out that strange, hollow sound that is never heard but in abandoned dwellings and tenanted tombs. For hours I wandered in this awful solitude, conscious of a seeking purpose, yet knowing not what I sought. At last, in what I conceived to be an extreme angle of the building, I entered a room of the ordinary dimensions, having a single window. Through this I saw the same crimson light still lying along the horizon in the measureless reaches of the west, like a visible doom, and knew it for the lingering fire of eternity. Looking upon the red menace of its sullen and sinister glare, there came to me the dreadful truth which

130 THE COLLECTED WORKS

years later as an extravagant fancy I endeavored to express in verse:

Man is long ages dead in every zone,
The angels all are gone to graves unknown;
The devils, too, are cold enough at last,
And God lies dead before the great white throne!

The light was powerless to dispel the obscurity of the room, and it was some time before I discovered in the farthest angle the outlines of a bed, and approached it with a prescience of ill. I felt that here somehow the bad business of my adventure was to end with some horrible climax, yet could not resist the spell that urged me to the fulfilment. Upon the bed, partly clothed, lay the dead body of a human being. It lay upon its back, the arms straight along the sides. By bending over it, which I did with loathing but no fear, I could see that it was dreadfully decomposed. The ribs protruded from the leathern flesh; through the skin of the sunken belly could be seen the protuberances of the spine. The face was black and shriveled and the lips, drawn away from the yellow teeth, cursed it with a ghastly grin. A fulness under the closed lids seemed to indicate that

the eyes had survived the general wreck; and this was true, for as I bent above them they slowly opened and gazed into mine with a tranquil, steady regard. Imagine my horror how you can—no words of mine can assist the conception; the eyes were my own! That vestigial fragment of a vanished race—that unspeakable thing which neither time nor eternity had wholly effaced—that hateful and abhorrent scrap of mortality, still sentient after death of God and the angels, was I!

There are dreams that repeat themselves. Of this class is one of my own,* which seems sufficiently singular to justify its narration, though truly I fear the reader will think the realms of sleep are anything but a happy hunting-ground for my night-wandering soul. This is not true; the greater number of my incursions into dreamland, and I suppose those of most others, are attended with the happiest results. My imagination returns to the body like a bee to the hive, loaded with spoil which, reason assisting, is transmuted to honey and stored away in the cells of memory to be a joy forever. But the dream which

* At my suggestion the late Flora Macdonald Shearer put this drama into sonnet form in her book of poems, *The Legend of Aulus*.

132 THE COLLECTED WORKS

I am about to relate has a double character; it is strangely dreadful in the experience, but the horror it inspires is so ludicrously disproportionate to the one incident producing it, that in retrospection the fantasy amuses.

I am passing through an open glade in a thinly wooded country. Through the belt of scattered trees that bound the irregular space there are glimpses of cultivated fields and the homes of strange intelligences. It must be near daybreak, for the moon, nearly at full, is low in the west, showing blood-red through the mists with which the landscape is fantastically freaked. The grass about my feet is heavy with dew, and the whole scene is that of a morning in early summer, glimmering in the unfamiliar light of a setting full moon. Near my path is a horse, visibly and audibly cropping the herbage. It lifts its head as I am about to pass, regards me motionless for a moment, then walks toward me. It is milk-white, mild of mien and amiable in look. I say to myself: "This horse is a gentle soul," and pause to caress it. It keeps its eyes fixed upon my own, approaches and speaks to me in a human voice, with human words. This does not surprise, but terrifies, and instantly I return to this our world.

The horse always speaks my own tongue, but I never know what it says. I suppose I vanish from the land of dreams before it finishes expressing what it has in mind, leaving it, no doubt, as greatly terrified by my sudden disappearance as I by its manner of accosting me. I would give value to know the purport of its communication.

Perhaps some morning I shall understand—and return no more to this our world.



THE REVIEWER

EDWIN MARKHAM'S POEMS

IN Edwin Markham's book, *The Man With the Hoe and Other Poems*, many of the "other poems" are excellent, some are great. If asked to name the most poetic—not, if you please, the "loftiest" or most "purposeful"—I think I should choose "The Wharf of Dreams." I venture to quote it:

Strange wares are handled on the wharves of sleep;
Shadows of shadows pass, and many a light
Flashes a signal fire across the night;
Barges depart whose voiceless steersmen keep
Their way without a star upon the deep;
And from lost ships, homing with ghostly crews,
Come cries of incommunicable news,
While cargoes pile the piers a moon-white heap—
Budgets of dream-dust, merchandise of song,
Wreckage of hope and packs of ancient wrong,
Nepenthes gathered from a secret strand,
Fardels of heartache, burdens of old sins,
Luggage sent down from dim ancestral inns,
And bales of fantasy from No-Man's Land.

Really, one does not every year meet with

138 THE COLLECTED WORKS

a finer blending of imagination and fancy than this; and I know not where to put a finger on two better lines in recent work than these:

And from lost ships, homing with ghostly crews,
Come cries of incommunicable news.

The reader to whom these strange lines do not give an actual physical thrill may rightly boast himself impregnable to poetic emotion and indocible to the meaning of it.

Mr. Markham has said of Poetry—and said greatly:

She comes like the hush and beauty of the night,
And sees too deep for laughter;
Her touch is a vibration and a light
From worlds before and after.

But she comes not always so. Sometimes she comes with a burst of music, sometimes with a roll of thunder, a clash of weapons, a roar of winds or a beating of billow against the rock. Sometimes with a noise of revelry, and again with the wailing of a dirge. Like Nature, she "speaks a various language." Mr. Markham, no longer content, as once he seemed to be, with interpreting her

fluting and warbling and "sweet jargoning," learned to heed her profounder notes, which stir the stones of the temple like the bass of a great organ.

In his "Ode to a Grecian Urn" Keats has supplied the greatest—almost the only truly great instance of a genuine poetic inspiration derived from art instead of nature. In his poems on pictures Mr. Markham shows an increasingly desperate determination to achieve success, coupled with a lessening ability to merit it. It is all very melancholy, the perversion of this man's high powers to the service of a foolish dream by artificial and impossible means. Each effort is more ineffectual than the one that went before. Unless he can be persuaded to desist—to cease interpreting art and again interpret nature, and turn also from the murmurs of "Labor" to the music of the spheres—the "surge and thunder" of the universe—the end of his good literary repute is in sight. He knows—does he know?—the bitter truth which he might have learned otherwise than by experience: that the plaudits of "industrial discontent," even when strengthened by scholars' commendations of a few great lines in the poem that evoked it, are not fame. He

should know, and if he live long will know, that when one begins to be a "labor leader" one ceases to be a poet.

In saying to Mr. Markham, "Thou ailest here and here," Mrs. Atherton has shown herself better at diagnosis than he is himself in telling us what is the matter with the rich. "Why," she asks him, "waste a beautiful gift in groveling for popularity with the mob? . . . Striving to please the common mind has a fatal commonizing effect on the writing faculty." It is even so—nothing truer could be said, and Mr. Markham is the best proof of its truth. His early work, when he was known to only a small circle of admirers, was so good that I predicted for him the foremost place among contemporaneous American poets. He sang because he "could not choose but sing," and his singing grew greater and greater. Every year he took wider outlooks from "the peaks of song"—had already got well above the fools' paradise of flowers and song-birds and bees and women and had invaded the "thrilling region" of the cliff, the eagle and the cloud, whence one looks down upon man and out upon the world. Then he had the mischance to publish "The Man with the Hoe," a poem with some noble

lines, but an ignoble poem. In the first place, it is, in structure, stiff, inelastic, monotonous. One line is very like another. The cæsural pauses fall almost uniformly in the same places; the full stops always at the finals. Comparison of the versification with Milton's blank will reveal the difference of method in all its significance. It is a difference analogous to that between painting on ivory and painting on canvas—between the dead, flat tints of the one and the lively, changing ones due to inequalities of surface in the other. If it seem a little exacting to compare Mr. Markham's blank with that of the only poet who has ever mastered that medium in English, I can only say that the noble simplicity and elevation of Mr. Markham's work are such as hardly to justify his admeasurement by any standard lower than the highest that we have.

My chief objection relates to the sentiment of the piece, the thought that the work carries; for although thought is no part of the poetry conveying it, and, indeed, is almost altogether absent from some of the most precious pieces (lyrical, of course) in our language, no elevated composition has the right to be called great if the message that it de-

142 THE COLLECTED WORKS

livers is neither true nor just. All poets, even the little ones, are feelers, for poetry is emotional; but all the great poets are thinkers as well. Their sympathies are as broad as the race, but they do not echo the peasant's philosophies of the workshop and the field. In Mr. Markham's poem the thought is that of the labor union—even to the workworn threat of rising against the wicked well-to-do and taking it out of their hides.

Who made him dead to rapture and despair,
A thing that grieves not and that never hopes,
Stolid and stunned, a brother to the ox?
Who loosened and let down this brutal jaw?
Whose was the hand that slanted back this brow?
Whose breath blew out the light within this brain?

One is somehow reminded by these lines of Coleridge's questions in the Chamouni hymn, and one is tempted to answer them the same way: God. "The Man with the Hoe" is not a product of the "masters, lords and rulers in all lands": they are not, and no class of men is, accountable for him, his limitations and his woes, which are not of those "that kings or laws can cause or cure." The "masters, lords and rulers" are as helpless "in the fell clutch of circumstance" as he—which

Mr. Markham would be speedily made to understand if appointed Dictator. The notion that the sorrows of the humble are due to the selfishness of the great is "natural," and can be made poetical, but it is silly. As a literary conception it has not the vitality of a sick fish. It will not carry a poem of whatever excellence through two generations. That a man of Mr. Markham's splendid endowments should be chained to the body of this literary death is no less than a public calamity.

For his better work in poetry Mr. Markham merits all the praise that he has received for "The Man with the Hoe," and more. It is not likely that he is now under any illusion in the matter. He probably knows the real nature of his sudden flare of "popularity"; knows that to-morrow it will be "one with Nineveh and Tyre"; knows that its only service to him is to arrest attention of competent critics and scholars who would otherwise have overlooked him for a time. The "plaudits of the multitude" can not long be held by the poet, and are not worth holding. The multitude knows nothing of poetry and does not read it. The multitude will applaud you to-day, calumniate you to-morrow

144 THE COLLECTED WORKS

and thwack you athwart the mazzard the day after. He who builds upon the sea-sand of its favor holds possession by a precarious tenure; the wind veers and the wave

Lolls out his large tongue—
Licks the whole labor flat.

If the great have left the humble so wise that the philosophies of the factory and the plow-tail are true; if the sentiments and the taste of the mob are so just and elevated that its judgment of poetry is infallible and its approval a precious possession; if "the masses" have more than "a thin veneering of civilization," and are not in peace as fickle as the weather and in anger as cruel as the sea; if these victims of an absolutely universal oppression "in *all* lands" are deep, discriminating, artistic, liberal, magnanimous—in brief, wise and good—it is difficult to see what they have to complain about. Mr. Markham, at least, is forbidden to weep for them, for he is a lover of Marcus Aurelius, of Seneca, of Epictetus. These taught, and taught truly—one from the throne of an empire, one writing at a gold table, and one in the intervals of service as a slave—the su-

preme value of wisdom and goodness, the vanity of power and wealth, the triviality of privation, discomfort and pain. Mr. Markham is a disciple of Jesus Christ, who from the waysides and the fields taught that poverty is not only a duty, but indispensable to salvation. So my *argumentum ad hominem* runs thus: The objects of our poet's fierce invective and awful threats have suffered his *protégés* to remain rather better off than they are themselves—have appropriated and monopolized only what is not worth having. In view of this mitigating circumstance I feel justified in demanding in their behalf a lighter sentence. Let the portentous effigy of the French Revolution be forbidden to make faces at them.

I know of few literary phenomena more grotesque than some of those growing out of "The Man with the Hoe"—that sudden popularity being itself a thing which "goes neare to be fonny." Mr. Markham, whom for many years those of us who modestly think ourselves *illuminati* considered a great poet whose greatness full surely was a-ripening, wrote many things far and away superior to "The Man," but these brought him recognition from the judicious only, with which we

would all have sworn that he was content. All at once he published a poem which, despite some of its splendid lines, is neither true in sentiment nor admirable in form—which is, in fact, addressed to peasant understandings and soured hearts. Instantly follow a blaze and thunder of notoriety, seen and heard over the entire continent; and even the coasts of Europe are “telling of the sound.” Straightway before the astonished vision of his friends the author stands transfigured! The charming poet has become a demagogue, a “labor leader” spreading that gospel of hate known as “industrial brotherhood,” a “walking delegate” diligently inciting a strike against God and clamoring for repeal of the laws of nature. Saddest of all, we find him conscientiously promoting his own vogue. He personally appears at meetings of cranks and incapables convened to shriek against the creed of law and order; speaks at meetings of sycophants eager to shine by his light; introduces lecturers to meetings of ninnies and femininnies convened to glorify themselves. When he is not waving the red flag of discontent and beating the big drum of revolution I presume he is resting—perched, St.-Simeon-Styliteswise, atop a lofty

capital I, erected in the market place, diligently and rapturously contemplating his new identity. All of which is very sad to those of us who find it difficult to unlove him.

The trouble with Mr. Markham is that he has formed the habit of thinking of mankind as divided on the property line—as comprising only two classes, the rich and the poor. When a man has acquired that habit he is lost to sense and righteousness. Assassins sometimes reform, and with increasing education thieves renounce the error of theft to embrace the evangel of embezzlement; but a demagogue never gets again into shape unless he becomes wealthy. I hope Mr. Markham's fame will so promote his pecuniary interest that it will convert him from the conviction that his birth was significantly coincident in point of time with the Second Advent. Only one thing is more disagreeable than a man with a mission, namely a woman with a mission, and the superior objectionableness of the latter is largely due to her trick of inspiring the former.

Mr. Markham seems now to look upon himself as the savior of society; to believe with entire sincerity that in his light and leading mankind can be guided out of the

wilderness of Self into the promised land of Altruria; that he can alter the immemorial conditions of human existence; that a new Heaven and a new Earth can be created by the power of his song. Most melancholy of all, the song has lost its power and its charm. Since he became the Laureate of Demagogy he has written little that is poetry: in the smug prosperity that he reviles in others, his great gift "shrinks to its second cause and is no more." That in the great white light of inevitable disillusion he will recover and repossess it, giving us again the flowers and fruits of a noble imagination in which the dream of an impossible and discreditable hegemony has no part, I should be sorry to disbelieve.

1899.

"THE KREUTZER SONATA"

I

NOTHING in this book directly discloses the author's views of the marriage relation. The horrible story of Posdnyschew's matrimonial experience—an experience which, barring its tragic finale, he affirms not to be an individual but a general one—is related by himself. There is no more in it to show directly what Tolstoi thinks of the matters in hand than there is in a play to show what the playwright thought. We are always citing the authority of Shakspeare by quotations from his plays—in which every sentiment is obviously conceived with a view to its fitness to the character of the imaginary person who utters it, and supplies no clew to the author's convictions.

In *The Kreutzer Sonata*, however, the case is somewhat different. Whereas Shakspeare had in view an artistic (and commercial) result, Tolstoi's intention is clearly moral: his

150 THE COLLECTED WORKS

aim is not entertainment, but instruction. To that end he foregoes the advantage of those literary effects which he so well knows how to produce, confining his exceptional powers to bald narrative, overlaid with disquisitions deriving their only vitality from the moral purpose everywhere visible.

A man marries a woman. They quarrel of course; their life is of course wretched beyond the power of words to express. Jealousy naturally ensuing, the man murders the woman. That is the "plot," and it is without embellishment. Its amplification is accomplished by "preaching"; its episodes are sermons on subjects not closely related to the main current of thought. Clearly, the aim of a book so constructed, even by a skilful literary artist, is not an artistic aim. Tolstoi desires it to be thought that he entertains the convictions uttered by the lips of Posdnyschew. He has, indeed, distinctly avowed them elsewhere than in this book. Like other convictions, they must stand or fall according to the stability of their foundation upon the rock of truth; but the fact that they are held by a man of so gigantic powers as Tolstoi gives them an interest and importance which the world, strange to say, has been quick to recognize.

Some of these convictions are peculiarly Tolstoi's own; others he holds in common with all men and women gifted with that rarest of intellectual equipments, the faculty of observation, and blessed with opportunity for its use. Anybody can see, but observation is another thing. It is something more than discernment, yet may be something less than accurate understanding of the thing discerned. Such as it is, Tolstoi has it in the highest degree. Nothing escapes him: his penetration is astonishing: he searches the very soul of things, making record of his discoveries with a pitiless frankness which to feebler understandings is brutal and terrifying. To him nothing is a mere phenomenon; everything is a phenomenon *plus* a meaning connected with a group of meanings. The meanings he may, and in my poor judgment commonly does, misread, but the phenomenon, the naked fact, he will see. Nothing can hide it from him nor make it appear to him better than it is. It is this terrible power of discernment, with this unsparing illumination compelling the reluctant attention of others, which environs him with animosities and implacable resentments. His is the Mont Blanc of minds; about the base of his conspicuous, cold intelligence the Arve and

152 THE COLLECTED WORKS

Arvieron of ignorance and optimism rave ceaselessly. It is of the nature of a dunce to confound exposure with complicity. Point out to him the hatefulness of that which he has been accustomed to admire, and nothing shall thenceforward convince him that you have not had a guilty hand in making it hateful. Tolstoi, in intellect a giant and in heart a child, a man of blameless life, and spotless character, devout, righteous, spectacularly humble and aggressively humane, has had the distinction to be the most widely and sincerely detested man of two continents. He has had the courage to utter a truth of so supreme importance that one-half the civilized world has for centuries been engaged in a successful conspiracy to conceal it from the other half—the truth that the modern experiment of monogamic marriage by the dominant tribes of Europe and America is a dismal failure. He is not the first by many who has testified to that effect, but he is the first in our time whose testimony has arrested so wide and general attention—a result that is to be attributed partly to his tremendous reputation and partly to his method of giving witness. He does not in this book deal in argument, is no controversialist. He says the

thing that is in him to say and we can take it or leave it.

The Kreutzer Sonata is not an obscene nor even an indelicate book: the mind that finds it so is an indelicate, an obscene mind. It is not, according to our popular notions, "a book for young girls." Nevertheless, it is most desirable that young girls should know—preferably through their parents who can speak with authority of experience—the truth which it enforces: namely, that marriage, like wealth, offers no hope of lasting happiness. Despite the implication that "they lived happily ever after," it is not for nothing that the conventional love story ends with the chime of wedding bells. As the Genius vanished when Mirza asked him what lay under the cloud beyond the rock of adamant, so the story teller prudently forestalls further investigation by taking himself off. He has an innate consciousness that the course of true love whose troubled current he has been tracing begins at marriage to assume something of the character of a raging torrent.

Tolstoi strikes hard: not one man nor woman a year married but must wince beneath his blows. They are all members of a dishonest conspiracy. They conceal their

wounds and swear that all is right and well with them. They give their Hell a good character, but in their secret souls they chafe and groan under the weight and heat of their chains. They come out from among their corruption and dead men's bones only to give the sepulchre another coating of whitewash and call attention to its manifold advantages as a dwelling. They are like the members of some "ancient and honorable order," who gravely repeat to others falsehoods by which they were themselves cheated into membership. The minatory oath alone is lacking, its binding restraint supplied by the cowardice that dares not brave the resentment of co-conspirators and the fury of their dupes.

No human institution is perfect, nor nearly perfect. None comes within a world's width of accomplishing the purpose for which it was devised, and all in time become so perverted as to serve a contrary one. But of all institutions, marriage as we have it here, and as they evidently have it in Russia, most lamentably falls short of its design. Nay, it is the one of them which is become most monstrously wrenched awry to the service of evil. To have observed this—to have had the intrepidity to affirm it in a world infested with

fools and malevolents who can not understand how anything can be known except by the feeble and misleading light of personal experience—that is much. It marks Tolstoi in a signal way as one eminent above the cloud-region, with a mental and spiritual outlook unaffected by the ground-reek of darkened counsel and invulnerable to the slings and arrows of defamation. Nevertheless, while admiring his superb courage and attesting the clarity of his vision, I think he imperfectly discerns the underlying causes of the phenomena that he reports.

Schopenhauer explains the shamefacedness of lovers, their tendency to withdraw into nooks and corners to do their wooing, by the circumstance that they plan a crime—they conspire to bring a human soul into a world of woe. Tolstoi takes something of the same ground as to the nature of their offence. Marriage he thinks a sin, and being a religionist regards the resulting and inevitable wretchedness as its appointed punishment.

“Little did I think of her physical and intellectual life,” says Posdnyschew, in explanation of conjugal antagonism. “I could not understand whence sprang our mutual

156 THE COLLECTED WORKS

hostility, but how clearly I see now! This hostility was nothing but the protest of human nature against the beast that threatened to devour it. I could not understand this hatred. And how could it have been different? This hostility was nothing else than the mutual hatred of two accessories in a crime—that of instigation, that of accomplishment.”

Marriage being a sin, it follows that celibacy is a virtue and a duty. Tolstoi has the courage of his convictions in this as in other things. He is too sharp not to see where this leads him and too honest to stop short of its logical conclusion. Here he is truly magnificent! He perceives that his ideal, if attained, would be annihilation of the race. That, as he has elsewhere in effect pointed out, is no affair of his. He is not concerned for the perpetuity of the race, but for its happiness through freedom from the lusts of the flesh. What is it to him if the god whom, oddly enough, he worships has done his work so badly that his creatures can not be at the same time chaste, happy and alive? Every one to his business—God as creator and, if he please, preserver; Tolstoi as reformer.

For his views on the duty of celibacy, it is only fair to say, Tolstoi goes directly to the

teaching of Jesus Christ, with what accuracy of interpretation, not being skilled in theology I am unwilling to say.

From his scorn of physicians it may be inferred that our author is imperfectly learned in their useful art, and therefore unfamiliar with whatever physiological side the question of celibacy may have. It is perhaps sufficient to say that in the present state of our knowledge the advantages of a life ordered after the Tolstoian philosophy seem rather spiritual than physical. Doubtless "they didn't know everything down in Judee," but St. Paul appears to have had a glimmering sense of this fact, if it is a fact.

To attribute the miseries which are inseparable from marriage as the modern Caucasian has the heroism to maintain it to any single and simple cause is most unphilosophical; our civilization is altogether too complex to admit of any such cheap and easy method. Doubtless there are many factors in the problem; a few, however, seem sufficiently obvious to any mind which, having an historical outlook wider than its immediate environment in time and space, with

extensive view

Surveys mankind from China to Peru.

158 THE COLLECTED WORKS

The monogamous marriage ignores, for example, the truth that Man is a polygamous animal. Of all the men and women who have been born into this world, only one in many has ever even so much as heard of any other system than polygamy. To suppose that within a few brief centuries monogamy has been by law and by talking so firmly established as effectually to have stayed the momentum of the original instinct is to hold that the day of miracles is not only not past, but has really only recently arrived. It implies, too, and entails, a blank blindness to the most patent facts of easy observation. With admirable gravity the modern Caucasian has legislated himself into theoretical monogamy, but he has, as yet, not effected a repeal of the laws of nature, and has in truth shown very little disposition to disregard them and observe his own. The men of our time and race are in heart and life about as polygamous as their good ancestors were before them, and everybody knows it who knows anything worth knowing. But not she to whom the knowledge would have the greatest practical value; the person whom all the powers of modern society seem in league to cheat; the young girl.

Another cause of the wretchedness of the married state—but of this Tolstoi seems inadequately conscious—is that marriage confers rights deemed incalculably precious which there is no means whatever of confirming and enforcing. The consciousness that these rights are held by the precarious tenure of a “vow” which never had, to one of the parties, much more than a ceremonial significance, and a good faith liable, in the other, to suspension by resentment and the vicissitudes of vanity and caprice; the knowledge that these rights are exposed to secret invasion invincible to the most searching inquiry; the savage superstition that their invasion “dishonors” the one to whom it is most hateful, and who of all persons in the world is least an accomplice—all this begets an apprehension which grows to distrust, and from distrust to madness. The apprehension is natural because reasonable: its successive stages of development are what you will, but the culmination is disaster and the wreck of peace.

Of the sombre phenomena of the marriage relation observable by men like Tolstoi, with eyes in their heads, brains behind the eyes and not too much scruple in selecting points

160 THE COLLECTED WORKS

of view outside the obscurity and confusion of a personal experience, a hundred additional explanations might be adduced, all more valid, in my judgment, than that to which he pins his too ready faith; but those noted seem sufficient. With regard to any matter touching less nearly the unreasoning sensibilities of the human heart, they would, I think, be deemed more than sufficient.

What, then—rejecting Tolstoi's prescription—is the remedy? In view of the failure of our experiment should we revert to first principles, adopting polygamy with such modifications as would better adapt it to the altered situation? Ought we to try free love, requiring the state to keep off its clumsy hands and let men and women as individuals manage this affair, as they do their religions, their friendships and their diet?

For my part I know of no remedy, nor do I believe that one can be formulated. It is of the nature of the more gigantic evils to be irremediable—a truth against which poor humanity instinctively revolts, entailing the additional afflictions of augmented nonsense and wasted endeavor. Nevertheless something may be done in mitigation. The marriage relation that we have we shall probably

continue to have, and its Dead Sea fruits will grow no riper and sweeter with time. But the lie that describes them as luscious and satisfying is needless. Let the young be taught, not celibacy, but fortitude. Point out to them the exact nature of the fool's paradise into which they will pretty certainly enter and perhaps ought to enter. Teach them that the purpose of marriage is whatever the teacher may conceive it to be, but *not* happiness. Mercifully reduce the terrible disproportion between expectation and result. In so far as *The Kreutzer Sonata* accomplishes this end, in so far as it teaches this lesson, it is a good book.

II

Tolstoi is a literary giant. He has a "giant's strength," and has unfortunately learned to "use it like a giant"—which, I take it, means not necessarily with conscious cruelty, but with stupidity. Excepting when he confines himself to pure romance, and to creation of works which, after the manner of Dr. Holmes, may be described as medicated fable—the man seems to write with the very faintest possible consciousness of anything

162 THE COLLECTED WORKS

good or even passably decent, in human nature. His characters are moved by motives which are redeemed from monstrous baseness only by being pettily base. In *War and Peace*, for example,—a book so crowded with characters, historical and imaginary, that the author himself can not carry them in his memory without dropping them all along his trail—there is but one person who is not either a small rascal or a great fool or both. Such a discreditable multitude of unpleasant persons no one but their maker—in whose image they are not made—ever collected between the covers of a single book. From Napoleon down to the ultimate mujik they go through life with heads full of confusion, hearts distended with selfishness and mouths running over with lies. If Tolstoi wrote as a satirist, with obvious cynicism, all this would be easily enough understood; but nothing, evidently, is further from his intention; he is essentially a preacher and honestly believes that his powerful caricatures are portraits from life; or rather—for that we may admit—that the total impression derived from a comprehensive view of them is a true picture of human character, charged in its every shadow (there are no lights) with in-

struction and edification. I can not say how it goes with others, but all that is left to me by this hideous "march past" of detestables; this sombre tableau of the intellectually dead; this fortuitous concourse of a random rascally unlawfully begotten of an exuberant fancy and a pitiless observation—"all of it all" that remains with me is a taste in the mouth which I can only describe as pallid.

In his personal character Tolstoi seems to be the only living Christian, in the sense in which Christ was a Christian—whatever credit may inhere in that—of whom we have any account; but in judging his books we have nothing to do with that. He has a superb imagination and must be master of a matchless style, for we get glimpses of it, even through the translations of men who are probably familiar enough with Russian and certainly altogether too familiar with English. The trouble with him is, as Mr. Matthew Arnold said of Byron, he doesn't know enough. He sees everything, but he has not freed his mind from the captivating absurdity, so dominant in the last generation, that human events occur without human agency, individual will counting for no more in the ordering of affairs than does a floating chip

in determining the course of the river. The commander of an army is commanded by his men. Napoleon was pushed by his soldiers hither and thither all over Europe; they by some blind, occult impulse which Tolstoi can not understand. He goes so far as to affirm that an army takes one route instead of another by silent consent and understanding among its widely separated fractions; infinitinely unaware that not one of them could move a mile without a dozen sets of detailed instructions to commanders, quartermasters, chiefs of ordnance, commissaries of subsistence, engineers and so forth. Tolstoi has entered the camp of History with a flag of truce and been blindfolded at the outpost.

When Tolstoi trusts to his imagination and doesn't need to know anything, he is inaccessible to censure. *The Cossacks*, one of his earlier works, is a prodigiously clever novel. About a half of the book, as I remember it, concerns itself with the killing of a single Circassian by a single Cossack. The shadow of that event is over it all, ominous, portentous; and I know of nothing finer nor more dramatic in its way than the narrative of the death of the dead man's avengers, knee to knee among the rain-pools of the steppe,

chanting through their beards their last fierce defiance. What to this was the slaughter at Austerlitz, the conflagration at Moscow, flinging its black shadows over half a world, if we have not Hugo's eyes to see them through? Only the gods look large upon Olympus.

But do me the favor to compare Tolstoi at his worst with other popular writers at their best. It is eagle and hens. It is sun and tallow candles. From the heights where he sits conspicuous, they are visible as black beetles. Nay, they are slugs; their brilliant work is a shine of slime which dulls behind them even as they creep. When one of these godlets dies the first man to pass his grave will say: "Why has he no monument?"—the second: "What! a monument?"—the third: "Who the devil was he?"

1890.

EMMA FRANCES DAWSON

IN nearly all of Miss Dawson's work that I have seen is an elusive something defying analysis, even description—something that is not in the words. I do not know how she gets it where it is; I never could either surprise her secret by swift strokes of attention, come upon it by patient still-hunting, nor in any way get at the trick of it. I can name it only in metaphor as a light behind the words; a light like that of Poe's "red litten eyes"; a light such as falls at sunset upon desolate marshes, tingeing the plumage of the tall heron and prophesying the joyless laugh of the loon. That selfsame light shines somewhere through and under Doré's long parallel cloud-bands along his horizons, and I have seen it, with an added bleakness, backgrounding the tall rood in the Lone Mountain cemetery of San Francisco. I dare say it is all very easy—to Miss Dawson: she simply writes and some "remote, unfriended, melancholy" ancestor stands by to "do the rest."

The publication of Miss Dawson's *An Itinerant House and Other Stories* is an event, doubtless, which does not seem at present—at least not to that cave-bat, “the general reader”—to cut much of a figure, but I shall miss my guess if it do not hold attention when Father Time has much that the world admires snugly tucked away in his wallet—“alms for oblivion.” This is a guess only: I am not a believer in the doctrine that good literary work has some inherent quality compelling recognition and conferring vitality. Good literary work, like anything else, endures if the conditions favor, perishes if they do not; so my guess, upon examination, dwindles to a hope compounded of rather more desire than expectation.

Miss Dawson's book is not to be judged as other books. It will help the reader to a just appreciation of this wonderful woman's work in letters if he understand beforehand that the world she sees is not the world we see; that her men and women are as unearthly as their environment, making no demands whatever on our sympathies, our affections, our admiration. Indeed, she cares nothing for them herself, putting an end to their strange, unhuman existence when done with them as in-

differently as a tired player removes the chessmen from board to box. This, for example, is how she disposes of a few that have become superfluous:

"Mrs. Anson proved a hard-faced, cold-hearted Cape Cod woman, a scold and drudge, who hated us as much as we disliked her. Homesick and unhappy, she soon went East and died. Within a year Anson was found dead where he had gone hunting in the Saucelito woods, supposed a suicide; Dering was hung by the Vigilantes and the rest were scattered on the four winds."

But when Miss Dawson's narrative flows with a loitering current you may commonly hear the sound of slow music and get glimpses of a darkened stage.

These stories have all a good deal of the supernatural and very little of the natural. The lover of "realism" (who is sometimes pleased to call himself a "veritist") may with great profit diligently let them alone; as may also the mere idler, who reads with a delinquent advertence, to pass the time. Miss Dawson is too true an artist to write for a slack attention: every page of her book is rich with significances underlying the narrative like gold in the bed of a stream. And this is especially true of the poems.

Those poems, by the way—how came they there? Why is there a poet in every story, whose verses have nothing to do with the action of the piece, though always in harmony with its spirit? I think I know the secret of this irrelevant feature of the work, and a pathetic one it is: Miss Dawson puts her poetry into her prose because she can not get it published otherwise—the more shame to our schools and public. Not all her verse is as good as the prose that carries it. Some of it is ungrammatical, and two whole pages of one piece have only the finals “ain” and “aining”—an insupportable performance. Much of it lacks ease, fluency; but all is worth reading and reading again; and in the “Ballade of the Sea of Sleep” are an elevation and largeness that no living poet has excelled.

The scene of all Miss Dawson’s stories is San Francisco—her San Francisco—San Francisco as she sees it from her eyrie atop of “Russian Hill.” To her it is a dream city—a city of wraiths and things forbidden to the senses—of half-heard whispers from tombs of men long dead and damned—of winds that sing dirges, clouds that are signs and portents, fogs peopled with fantastic ex-

170 THE COLLECTED WORKS

istences pranking like mad, as is the habit of all sea-folk on shore leave—a city where it is never morning, where the birds never sing, where children are unknown, and where at night the street-lights at the summits of the hills “flare as if out of the sky,” signaling mysterious messages from another world. In short, this sister to Hugo has breathed into the gross material San Francisco so strange a soul that to him who has read her book the name of the town must henceforth have a meaning that never before attached to any word of human speech. Wherefore I say of this book that it is a work of supreme genius; and I try to have faith to believe that whatever else may befall it, while the language in which it is written remains intelligible to men it will not fail to challenge the attention and engage the interest of the judicious.

To those who have feared the effect upon Miss Dawson’s powers of time, sorrow, privation and hope deferred, it is a joy to note that her latest and longest story, “A Gracious Visitation”—the one written especially for this volume, the others being from twenty to thirty years old—is the best. It is indeed a marvelous creation, and I know of nothing in literature having a sufficient resemblance

to it to serve as a basis of comparison. In point of mere originality, I should say it is unsurpassed and unsurpassable; the ability to figure to oneself a story more novel and striking would, in a writer, imply the ability to write one—which I think the most capable writer would be slowest to claim. The best of the other stories is by no means the one that gives its title to the book. I shall not undertake to say which is best, but shall conclude by quoting the “envoy” of “The Ballade of the Sea of Sleep”;

Archangels, princes, thrones, dominions, powers,
Which of you dwarf the centuries to hours,
Or swell the moments into æons' sweep?
Is it the Prince of Darkness, then, who cowers
Below the dream-waves of the Sea of Sleep?

1897.

MARIE BASHKIRTSEFF

UPON the cover of the English translation of this young artist's journal is displayed Gladstone's judgment that it is "a book without a parallel." That is not very high praise, certainly; it may be said of many books which the judicious would "willingly let die"; and in this case the judicious will hope that a parallel work may be long denied to the taste that craves it. The book from cover to cover is distinctly unwholesome. It has the merit of candor; its frankness is appalling. Yet one can not help suspecting the quality of that frankness. Did this young girl, who began at twelve, and for a dozen years—almost to the day of her death—poured into her journal her heterogenous and undigested thoughts, fancies and feelings with a view to publication and a hope of fame as a result of it—did she after all make as honest a record as she doubtless supposed herself to be doing? It will hardly seem so to one who has written much for publication.

Such a one may justly enough distrust, although he can not altogether reject, the evidences of the text, which are necessarily studied and interpreted in the light of the text itself; but knowing something of the conditions of literary composition he will be slow to believe that the young diarist could at the same time remember and forget that she was writing to be read. Nor will it seem to him that his doubt if she put down all that came into her head is too hardy an assumption of knowledge of how Russian young women think and feel. Something doubtless must be allowed for individual character and disposition in this case as in another, but then, too, one must be permitted to remember that even a Russian young woman of more or less consuming self-consciousness and sex-consciousness is merely human, belonging to the race which daily thanks its Maker for not putting windows in breasts. Even a Russian maiden with a private method of estimating her intellectual importance who should write *all* her thoughts would probably be invited to stay her steps toward the Temple of Fame long enough to make acquaintance of the police.

But if the diarist has not written down all

her thoughts and feelings, how can the reader be quite sure that she has accurately reported those of them that she professes to give?—how that they are not afterthoughts, some of them, at least, evolved in the process of revision for the press? I do not know if upon this point there is any other than internal evidence and the probabilities; my reading in the somewhat raw and raucous literature of the subject has not been quite exhaustive. The internal evidence and the probabilities point pretty plainly to revision of the text, for which the reader might have been more grateful if it had been more thoroughly made. Much of the book, in truth, might advantageously have been revised out of existence—much of what is left, I mean.

Marie Bashkirtseff was born in 1860 and died of consumption in 1884. She was given a good education and knew some of the advantages of travel. Having a love of art—which she mistook for ability to produce works of art—she became a painter and by dint of study under the spur of vanity performed some fairly creditable work which, while the fashion of reading her journal was “on,” commanded fair prices and brought gladness and sunshine into the homes of good

Americans of long purses and short schooling. She was perhaps rather more than less successful in painting than in expounding the excellences of the paintings of others. In such criticism as she gives us in her journal one does not detect any understanding. "This is not art; it is Nature herself"; "the face is real; it is flesh and blood"—such judgments as these are sprinkled all through the book, recalling the dear old familiar jargon of the "dramatic critics" of the newspapers; "Jonesmith was no longer himself but Hamlet"; "Brown-Robinson completely identified himself with his rôle, and it was Julius Cæsar himself that we saw before our eyes." The crudest and most meaningless form of art criticism is to declare the representation the thing represented, and poor Marie Bashkirtseff seldom goes further in accounting for her adoration of the works of such masters as Bastien-Lepage, Corot and Duran.

There must have been something engaging in the girl, for she seems to have acquired the friendship of such men, and to have retained it. Her account of those last days when she and Bastien-Lepage—each with a leg in the grave, like a caught fox dragging

its trap—caused themselves to be brought together to compare the ravages of their disorders in silence is pathetic with the pathos of the morgue. One would rather have been spared it. It leaves a bad taste in the memory and fitly concludes a book which is morbid, hysterical and unpleasant beyond anything of its kind in literature—"a book without a parallel." It enforces and illustrates a useful truth: that when suffering from internal disorders one can not afford to turn oneself inside out as an exercise in literary calisthenics.

1887.

A POET AND HIS POEM

(From "*The Cosmopolitan*" Magazine, September, 1907)

WHATEVER length of days may be accorded to this magazine, it is not likely to do anything more notable in literature that it accomplishes in this issue by publication of Mr. George Sterling's poem, "A Wine of Wizardry." Doubtless the full significance of this event will not be immediately apprehended by more than a select few, for understanding of poetry has at no time been a very general endowment of our countrymen. After a not inconsiderable acquaintance with American men of letters and men of affairs I find myself unable to name a dozen of whom I should be willing to affirm their possession of this precious gift—for a gift it indubitably is; and of these not all would, in my judgment, be able to discern the light of genius in a poem not authenticated by a name already famous, or credentialed by a general

178 THE COLLECTED WORKS

assent. It is not commonly permitted to even the luckiest of poets to "set the Thames on fire" with his first match; and I venture to add that the Hudson is less combustible than the Thames. Anybody can see, or can think that he sees, what has been pointed out, but original discovery is another matter. Carlyle, indeed, has noted that the first impression of a work of genius is disagreeable—which is unfortunate for its author if he is unknown, for upon editors and publishers a first impression is usually all that he is permitted to make.

From the discouraging operation of these uncongenial conditions Mr. Sterling is not exempt, as the biography of this poem would show; yet Mr. Sterling is not altogether unknown. His book, *The Testimony of the Suns, and Other Poems*, published in 1903, brought him recognition in the literary Nazareth beyond the Rocky Mountains, whose passes are so vigilantly guarded by cis-montane criticism. Indeed, some sense of the might and majesty of the book's title poem succeeded in crossing the dead-line while watch-worn sentinels slept "at their insuperable posts." Of that work I have the temerity to think that in both subject and art

it nicks the rock as high as anything of the generation of Tennyson, and a good deal higher than anything of the generation of Kipling; and this despite its absolute destitution of what contemporary taste insists on having—the “human interest.” Naturally, a dramatist of the heavens, who takes the suns for his characters, the deeps of space for his stage, and eternity for his “historic period,” does not “look into his heart and write” emotionally; but there is room in literature for more than emotion. In the “other poems” of the book the lower need is supplied without extravagance and with no admixture of sentimentality. But what we are here concerned with is “A Wine of Wizardry.”

In this remarkable poem the author proves his allegiance to the fundamental faith of the greatest of those “who claim the holy Muse as mate”—a faith which he has himself “confessed” thus:

Remiss the ministry they bear
 Who serve her with divided heart;
 She stands reluctant to impart
 Her strength to purpose, end, or care.

Here, as in all his work, we shall look in

vain for the "practical," the "helpful." The verses serve no cause, tell no story, point no moral. Their author has no "purpose, end, or care" other than the writing of poetry. His work is as devoid of motive as is the song of a skylark—it is merely poetry. No one knows what poetry is, but to the enlightened few who know what is poetry it is a rare and deep delight to find it in the form of virgin gold. "Gold," says the miner "vext with odious subtlety" of the mineralogist with his theories of deposit—"gold is where you find it." It is no less precious whether you have crushed it from the rock, or washed it from the gravel, but some of us care to be spared the labor of reduction, or sluicing. Mr. Sterling's reader needs no outfit of mill and pan.

I am not of those who deem it a service to letters to "encourage" mediocrity—that is one of the many ways to starve genius. From the amiable judgment of the "friendly critic" with his heart in his head, otherwise unoccupied, and the *laudator literarum* who finds every month, or every week—according to his employment by magazine or newspaper—more great books than I have had the luck to find in a half-century, I dissent. My no-

tion is that an age which produces a half-dozen good writers and twenty books worth reading is a memorable age. I think, too, that contemporary criticism is of small service, and popular acclaim of none at all, in enabling us to know who are the good authors and which the good books. Naturally, then, I am not overtrustful of my own judgment, nor hot in hope of its acceptance. Yet I steadfastly believe and hardily affirm that George Sterling is a very great poet—incomparably the greatest that we have on this side of the Atlantic. And of this particular poem I hold that not in a lifetime has our literature had any new thing of equal length containing so much poetry and so little else. It is as full of light and color and fire as any of the “ardent gems” that burn and sparkle in its lines. It has all the imagination of “Comus” and all the fancy of “The Faerie Queene.” If Leigh Hunt should return to earth to part and catalogue these two precious qualities he would find them in so confusing abundance and so inextricably interlaced that he would fly in despair from the impossible task.

Great lines are not all that go to the making of great poetry, but a poem with many

182 THE COLLECTED WORKS

great lines is a great poem, even if it have—as usually it has, and as “A Wine of Wizardry” has not—prosaic lines as well. To quote all the striking passages in Mr. Sterling’s poem would be to quote most of the poem, but I will ask the reader’s attention to some of the most graphic and memorable.

A cowed magician peering on the damned
Thro’ vials wherein a splendid poison burns.

’Mid pulse of dungeoned forges down the stunned,
Undominated firmament.

It is not for me to say what may be meant here by “undominated,” any more than to explain what Shakspeare meant by

To lie in cold *obstruction* and to rot.

A poet makes his own words and his own definitions: it is for the rest of us to accept them and see to it that there is no interference by that feeble folk, the lexicographers.

a dell where some mad girl hath flung
A bracelet that the painted lizards fear—
Red pyres of muffled light!

or Keats's

magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faerie lands forlorn—

passages which Rossetti pronounced the two Pillars of Hercules of human thought.

One of a poet's most authenticating credentials may be found in his epithets. In them is the supreme ordeal to which he must come and from which is no appeal. The epithets of the versifier, the mere metrician, are either contained in their substantives or add nothing that is worth while to the meaning; those of the true poet are instinct with novel and felicitous significances. They personify, ennoble, exalt, spiritualize, endow with thought and feeling, touch to action like the spear of Ithuriel. The prosaic mind can no more evolve such than ditch-water in a champagne-glass can sparkle and effervesce, or cold iron give off coruscations when hammered. Have the patience to consider a few of Mr. Sterling's epithets, besides those in the lines already quoted:

"Purpled" realm; "striving" billows;
"wattled" monsters; "timid" sapphires of
the snow; "lit" wastes; a "stained" twilight

186 BIERCE'S COLLECTED WORKS

of the South; "tiny" twilight in the jacinth, and "wintry" orb of the moonstone; "winy" agate and "banded" onyx; "lustrous" rivers; "glowering" pyres of the burning-ghaut, and so forth.

Do such words come by taking thought? Do they come ever to the made poet?—to the "poet of the day"—poet by resolution of a "committee on literary exercises"? Fancy the poor pretender, conscious of his pretense and sternly determined to conceal it, laboring with a brave confusion of legs and a copious excretion of honest sweat to evolve felicities like these!

THE CONTROVERSIALIST

AN INSURRECTION OF THE PEASANTRY

(From "*The Cosmopolitan*" Magazine, December, 1907)

WHEN a man of genius who is not famous writes a notable poem he must expect one or two of three things: indifference, indignation, ridicule. In commending Mr. George Sterling's "A Wine of Wizardry," published in the September number of this magazine, I had this reception of his work in confident expectation and should have mistrusted my judgment if it had not followed. The promptitude of the chorus of denunciation and scorn has attested the superb character of the poet's work and is most gratifying.

The reason for the inevitable note of dissent is not far to seek; it inheres in the constitution of the human mind, which is instinctively hostile to what is "out of the common"—and a work of genius is pretty sure to be that. It is by utterance of uncommon

190 THE COLLECTED WORKS

thoughts, opinions, sentiments and fancies that genius is known. All distinction is difference, unconformity. He who is as others are—whose mental processes and manner of expression follow the familiar order—is readily acceptable because easily intelligible to those whose narrow intelligence, barren imagination, and meager vocabulary he shares. "Why, that is great!" says that complacent dullard, "the average man," smiling approval. "I have thought that a hundred times myself!"—thereby providing abundant evidence that it is not great, nor of any value whatever. To "the average man" what is new is inconceivable, and what he does not understand affronts him. And he is the first arbiter in letters and art. In this "fierce democracie" he dominates literature with a fat and heavy hand—a hand that is not always unfamiliar with the critic's pen.

In returning here to the subject of Mr. Sterling's poem I have no intention of expounding and explaining it to persons who know nothing of poetry and are inaccessible to instruction. Those who, in the amusing controversy which I unwittingly set raging round Mr. Sterling's name, have spoken for them are in equal mental darkness and some-

what thicker moral, as it is my humble hope to show.

When the cause to be served is ignorance, the means of service is invariably misrepresentation. The champion of offended Dulness falsifies in statement and cheats in argument, for he serves a client without a conscience. A knowledge of right and wrong is not acquired to-day, as in the time of Adam and Eve, by eating an apple; and it is attained by only the highest intelligences.

But before undertaking the task of pointing out the moral unworth of my honorable opponents, it seems worth while to explain that the proponent of the controversy has had the misfortune to misunderstand the question at issue. He has repeatedly fallen into the error of affirming, with all the emphasis of shouting capitals, that "Ambrose Bierce says it ["A Wine of Wizardry"] is the greatest poem ever written in America," and at least once has declared that I pronounced it "the only great poem ever written in America." If the dispute had been prolonged I shudder to think that his disobedient understanding might have misled him to say that I swore it was the only great poem ever written, in all the world.

192 THE COLLECTED WORKS

To those who know me it is hardly needful, I hope, to explain that I said none of the words so generously put into my mouth, for it is obvious that I have not seen, and could not have seen, all the poems that have been written in America. To have pronounced such a judgment without all the evidence would have been to resemble my opponents—which God forbid! In point of fact, I do not consider the poem the greatest ever written in America; Mr. Sterling himself, for example, has written a greater. Exposed to so hardy and impenitent misrepresentation I feel a need of the consolations of religion: I should like positively to know where my critics are going to when they die. From my present faltering faith in their future I derive an imperfect comfort.

Naturally, not all protagonists of the commonplace who have uttered their minds about this matter are entitled to notice. The Baseball Reporter who, says Mr. Brisbane, "like Mr. Sterling, is a poet," the Sweet Singer of Slang, the Simian Lexicographer of Misinformation, and the Queen of Platitudinaria who has renounced the sin-and-sugar of youth for the milk-and-morality of age must try to forgive me if I leave them grinning through

their respective horse-collars to a not unkind inattention.

But Deacon Harvey is a person of note and consequence. On a question of poetry, I am told, he controls nearly the entire Methodist vote. Moreover, he has a notable knack at mastery of the English language, which he handles with no small part of the ease and grace that may have distinguished the impenitent thief carrying his cross up the slope of Calvary. Let the following noble sentences attest the quality of his performance when he is at his best:

A natural hesitation to undertake analysis of the unanalyzable, criticism of the uncriticizable, or, if we may go so far, mention of the unmentionable, yields to your own shrewd forging of the links of circumstance into a chain of duty. That the greatest poem ever written on this hemisphere, having forced its way out of a comfortable lodgment in the brain of an unknown author, should be discovered and heralded by a connoisseur whose pre-eminence is yet to be established, is perhaps in itself not surprising, and yet we must admit that the mere rarity of such a happening would ordinarily preclude the necessity, which otherwise might exist, of searching inquiry as to the attributed transcendentalism of merit.

Surely a man who habitually writes such

194 THE COLLECTED WORKS

prose as that must be a good judge of poetry or he would not be a good judge of anything in literature. And what does this Prince Paramount of grace and clarity find to condemn in poor Mr. Sterling's poem? Listen with at least one ear each:

We are willing to admit at the outset that in the whole range of American, or, for that matter, English, poetry there is no example of a poem crowded with such startling imagery, ambitiously marshaled in lines of such lurid impressiveness, all of which at once arrest attention and would bewilder the esthetic sensibility of a Titan. The poem is made up of an unbroken series of sententious and striking passages, any one of which would have distinguished a whole canto of Dante or Keats, neither of whom would have ventured within that limit to use more than one—such was their niggardly economy.

Here is something "rich and strange" in criticism. Heretofore it has been thought that "wealth of imagery" was about the highest quality that poetry could have, but it seems not; that somewhat tiresome phrase is to be used henceforth to signify condemnation. Of the poem that we wish to commend we must say that it has an admirable poverty of imagination. Deacon Harvey's notion that poets like Dante and Keats deliberately refrained

from using more than one "sententious and striking passage" to the canto "goes neare to be fonny." They used as many as occurred to them; no poet uses fewer than he can. If he has only one to a canto, that is not economy; it is indigence.

I observe that even so good a poet and so appreciative a reader of Mr. Sterling as Miss Ina Coolbrith has fallen into the same error as Deacon Harvey. Of "the many pictures presented in that wondrous 'Wine of Wizardry,'" this accomplished woman says: "I think it is a 'poem'—a great poem—but one which, in my humble estimate, might have been made even greater could its creator have permitted himself to drop a little of what some may deem a weakening superfluity of imagery and word-painting."

If one is to make "pictures" in poetry one must do so by word-painting. (I admit the hatefulness of the term "word-painting," through overuse of the name in praise of the prose that the thing defaces, but it seems that we must use it here.) Only in narrative and didactic poetry, and these are the lowest forms, can there be too much of imagery and word-painting; in a poem essentially graphic, like the one under consideration, they are the

strength and soul of the work. "A Wine of Wizardry" is, and was intended to be, a series, a succession, of unrelated pictures, colored (mostly red, naturally) by what gave them birth and being—the reflection of a sunset in a cup of ruddy wine. To talk of too much imagery in a work of that kind is to be like Deacon Harvey.

Imagery, that is to say, imagination, is not only the life and soul of poetry; it is the poetry. That is what Poe had in mind doubtless, when he contended that there could be no such thing as a long poem. He had observed that what are called long poems consist of brief poetical passages connected by long passages of metrical prose—*recitativo*—of oases of green in deserts of gray. The highest flights of imagination have always been observed to be the briefest. George Sterling has created a new standard, another criterion. In "A Wine of Wizardry," as in his longer and greater poem, "The Testimony of the Suns," there is no *recitativo*. His imagination flies with a tireless wing. It never comes to earth for a new spring into the sky, but like the eagle and the albatross, sustains itself as long as he chooses that it shall. His passages of poetry are connected by passages

of poetry. In all his work you will find no line of prose. Poets of the present and the future may well "view with alarm" as Statesman Harvey would say—the work that Sterling has cut out for them, the pace that he has set. Poetry must henceforth be not only qualitative but quantitative: it must be *all* poetry. If wise, the critic will note the new criterion that this bold challenge to the centuries has made mandatory. The "long poem" has been shown to be possible; let us see if it become customary.

In affirming Mr. Sterling's primacy among living American poets I have no apology to offer to the many unfortunates who have written to me in the spirit of the man who once said of another: "What! that fellow a great man? Why, he was born right in my town!" It is humbly submitted, however, that unless the supply of great men is exhausted they must be born somewhere, and the fact that they are seen "close to" by their neighbors does not supply a reasonable presumption against their greatness. Shakspeare himself was once a local and contemporary poet, and even Homer is known to have been born in "seven Grecian cities" through which he "begged his bread." Is Deacon Harvey al-

together sure that he is immune to the popular inability to understand that the time and place of a poet's nativity are not decisive as to his rating? He may find a difficulty in believing that a singer of supreme excellence was born right in *his* country and period, but in the words that I have quoted from him he has himself testified to the fact. To be able to write "an unbroken series of sententious and striking passages"; to crowd a poem, as no other in the whole range of our literature has done, with "startling imagery" "in lines of impressiveness," lurid or not; to "arrest attention"; to "bewilder the Titans," Deacon Harvey at their head—that is about as much as the most ambitious poet could wish to accomplish at one sitting. The ordinary harpist harping on his Harpers' would be a long time in doing so much. How any commentator, having in those words conceded my entire claim, could afterward have the hardihood to say, "The poem has no merit," transcends the limits of human comprehension and passes into the dark domain of literary criticism.

Nine in ten of the poem's critics complain of the fantastic, grotesque, or ghastly nature of its fancies. What would these good per-

sons have on the subject of wizardry?—sweet and sunny pictures of rural life?—love scenes in urban drawing-rooms?—beautiful sentiments appropriate to young ladies' albums?—high moral philosophy with an "appeal" to what is "likeliest God within the soul"? Deacon Harvey (O, I cannot get away from Deacon Harvey: he fascinates me!) would have "an interpretation of vital truth." I do not know what that is, but we have his word for it that nothing else is poetry. And no less a personage than Mrs. Gertrude Atherton demands, instead of wizardry, an epic of prehistoric California, or an account of the great fire, preferably in prose, for, "this is not an age of poetry, anyway." Alas, poor Sterling!—damned alike for what he wrote and what he didn't write. Truly, there are persons whom one may not hope to please.

It should in fairness be said that Mrs. Atherton confesses herself no critic of poetry—the only person, apparently, who is not—but pronounces Mr. Sterling a "recluse" who "needs to see more and read less." From a pretty long acquaintance with him I should say that this middle-aged man o' the world is as little "reclusive" as any one that I know, and has seen rather more of life than is good

200 THE COLLECTED WORKS

for him. And I doubt if he would greatly gain in mental stature by unreading Mrs. Atherton's excellent novels.

Sterling's critics are not the only persons who seem a bit blinded by the light of his genius: Mr. Joaquin Miller, a born poet and as great-hearted a man as ever lived, is not quite able to "place" him. He says that this "titanic, magnificent" poem is "classic" "in the Homeric, the Miltonic sense." "A Wine of Wizardry" is not "classic" in the sense in which scholars use that word. It is all color and fire and movement, with nothing of the cold simplicity and repose of the Grecian ideal. Nor is it Homeric, nor in the Miltonic vein. It is in no vein but the author's own; in the entire work is only one line suggesting the manner of another poet—the last in this passage:

Who leads from hell his whitest queens, arrayed
In chains so heated at their master's fire
That one new-damned had thought their bright attire
Indeed were coral, till the dazzling dance
So terribly that brilliance shall enhance.

That line, the least admirable in the poem, is purely Byronic. Possibly Mr. Miller meant that Sterling's work is like Homer's

and Milton's, not in manner, but in excellence; and it is.

Mr. Sterling's critics may at least claim credit for candor. For cause of action, as the lawyers say, they aver his use of strange, unfamiliar words. Now this is a charge that any man should be ashamed to make; first, because it is untrue; second, because it is a confession of ignorance. There are not a half-dozen words in the poem that are not in common use by good authors, and none that any man should not blush to say that he does not understand. The objection amounts to this: that the poet did not write down to the objector's educational level—did not adapt his work to "the meanest capacity." Under what obligation was he to do so? There are men whose vocabulary does not exceed a few hundreds of words; they know not the meaning of the others because they have not the thoughts that the others express. Shall these Toms, Dicks and Harrys of the slums and cornfields set up their meager acquirements as metes and bounds beyond which a writer shall not go? Let them stay upon their reservations. There are poets enough, great poets, too, whom they can partly understand; that is, they can understand the simple language,

202 THE COLLECTED WORKS

the rhymes, the meter—everything but the poetry. There are orders of poetry, as there are orders of architecture. Because a Grecian temple is beautiful shall there be no Gothic cathedrals? By the way, it is not without significance that Gothic architecture was first so called in derision, the Goths having no architecture. It was named by the Deacon Harveys of the period.

The passage that has provoked this class of critics to the most shameless feats of self-exposure is this:

Infernal rubrics, sung to Satan's might,
Or chanted to the Dragon in his gyre.

Upon this they have expended all the powers of ridicule belonging to those who respect nothing because they know nothing. A person of light and leading in their bright band* says of it:

“We confess that we had never before heard of a ‘gyre.’ Looking it up in the dictionary, we find that it means a gyration, or a whirling round. Rubrics chanted to a dragon while he was whirling ought to be worth hearing.”

* Mr. Arthur Brisbane.

Now, whose fault is it that this distinguished journalist had never heard of a gyre? Certainly not the poet's. And whose that in very sensibly looking it up he suffered himself to be so misled by the lexicographer as to think it a gyration, a whirling round? Gyre means, not a gyration, but the path of a gyration, an orbit. And has the poor man no knowledge of a dragon in the heavens?—the constellation Draco, to which, as to other stars, the magicians of old chanted incantations? A peasant is not to be censured for his ignorance, but when he glories in it and draws its limit as a dead line for his betters he is the least pleasing of all the beasts of the field.

An amusing instance of the commonplace mind's inability to understand anything having a touch of imagination is found in a criticism of the now famous lines:

The blue-eyed vampire, sated at her feast,
Smiles bloodily against the leprous moon.

"Somehow," says the critic, who, naturally, is a book-reviewer, "one does not associate blue eyes with a vampire." Of course it did not occur to him that this was doubtless the very reason why the author chose the epithet

204 THE COLLECTED WORKS

—if he thought of anybody's conception but his own. "Blue-eyed" connotes beauty and gentleness; the picture is that of a lovely, fair-haired woman with the telltale blood about her lips. Nothing could be less horrible; nothing more terrible. As vampires do not really exist, everyone is at liberty, I take it, to conceive them under what outward and visible aspect he will; but this gentleman, having standardized the vampire, naturally resents any departure from the type—his type. I fancy he requires goggle-eyes, emitting flame and perhaps smoke, a mouth well garnished with tusks—long claws, and all the other appurtenances that make the conventional Chinese dragon so awful that one naturally wishes to meet it and kick it.

Between my mind and the minds of those whom Mr. Sterling's daring incursions into the realm of the unreal do not affect with a keen artistic delight there is nothing in common—except a part of my vocabulary. I cannot hope to convince nor persuade them. Nevertheless, it is no trouble to point out that their loud pretense of being "shocked" by some of his fancies is a singularly foolish one. We are not shocked by the tragic, the terrible, even the ghastly, in literature and art. We do

not flee from the theater when a tragedy is enacting—the murder of Duncan and the sleeping grooms—the stabbing and poisoning in “Hamlet.” We listen without discomposure to the beating to death of Nancy Sykes behind the scenes. The Ancient Mariner’s dead comrades rise and pull at the ropes without disturbing the reader; even the “slimy things” “crawl with legs upon a slimy sea” and we do not pitch the book into the fire. Dante’s underworld, with all its ingenious horrors, page after page of them, are accounted pretty good reading—at least Dante is accounted a pretty good poet. No one stands forth to affirm his distress when Homer’s hero declares that

Swarms of specters rose from deepest hell
 With bloodless visage and with hideous yell.
 They scream, they shriek; sad groans and dismal sounds
 Stun my scared ears and pierce Hell’s utmost bounds.

Literature is full of pictures of the terrible, the awful, the ghastly, if you please; hardly a great author but has given them to us in prose or verse. They shock nobody, for they produce no illusion, not even on the stage, or the canvases of Vereshchagin. If they did they would be without artistic value.

206 THE COLLECTED WORKS

But it is the fashion to pretend to be horrified—when the terrible thing is new and by an unfamiliar hand. The Philistine who accepts without question the horrors of Dante's Hell professes himself greatly agitated when Sterling's

Satan, yawning on his brazen seat,
Fondles a screaming thing his fiends have flayed.

In point of fact, the poor Philistine himself yawns as he reads about it; he is not shocked at all. It is comprehensible how there may be such a thing as a mollycoddle, but how one can pretend to be a mollycoddle when one is not—that must be accepted as the most surprising hypocrisy that we have the happiness to know about.

Having affirmed the greatness of Mr. Sterling, I am austere reminded by a half hundred commentators, some of whom profess admiration for "A Wine of Wizardry," that a single poem, of whatever excellence, does not establish the claim. Like nearly all the others, these gentlemen write without accuracy, from a general impression. They overlook the circumstance that I pointed out a book by Sterling, published several years ago,

entitled *The Testimony of the Suns, and Other Poems*. What, then, becomes of the "single poem" sneer? To its performers nothing that they have not seen exists.

That book is dedicated to me—a fact that has been eagerly seized upon by still another class of critics to "explain" my good opinion of its author; for nothing is so welcome to our literary hill-tribes as a chance to cheat by ascription of a foul motive. But it happens, unhappily for the prosperity of their hope, that the dedication was made in gratitude for my having already set the crown of praise upon its author's head. I will quote the first lines of the dedication, not only in proof of this, but to show the noble seriousness and sincerity with which a great poet regards his ministry at the altar of his art:

Ah! glad to thy decree I bow,
 From whose unquestioned hand did fall,
 Beyond a lesser to recall,
 The solemn laurels on my brow.

I tremble with the splendid weight.
 To my unworth 'tis given to know
 How dread the charge I undergo
 Who claim the holy Muse as mate.

208 THE COLLECTED WORKS

It is to be hoped that Mr. Sterling's reverent attitude toward his art has suffered no abatement from his having been thrown to the swine for allegiance to an alien faith hateful to his countrymen.

MONTAGUES AND CAPULETS

I HAVE not the happiness to know if Mr. George Bernard Shaw has ever written as good a play as "As You Like It." He says he has, and certainly he ought to be able to remember what plays he has written. I don't know that blank verse is, as Mr. Shaw declares, "a thing that you could teach a cat if it had an ear." My notion is that blank verse—good blank verse—is the most difficult of all metrical forms, and that among English poets Milton alone has mastered it. I don't know that Mr. Shaw is right in his sweeping condemnation of the blank verse of that indubitable "master of tremendous prose," Shakspeare. As a critic, Mr. Shaw ought to know that Shakspeare wrote very little blank verse, technically and properly so called, his plays being, naturally, mostly in what the prosodian knows, and what as a playwright Mr. Shaw might be expected to know, as dramatic blank, a very different thing.

But this I know, and know full well—

210 THE COLLECTED WORKS

that in ridiculing the blind, unreasoning adoration of Shakspeare as an infallible and impeccable god in whose greater glory all *dii minores* must hide their diminished heads and pale their uneffectual fires, Mr. Shaw does well and merits sympathetic attention. Without going so far as Voltaire, one may venture without irreverence to hold an opinion of one's own as to the great Englishman's barbarous exuberance of metaphor, pure and mixed, his poverty of invention in the matter of plots, his love of punning, his tireless pursuit of a quibble to the ultimate ramifications of its burrow, and a score of other faults which in others his thick-and-thin protagonists freely condemn. Many of these sins against art were doubtless the offspring of a giant indolence, and sole desire to draw the rabble of the streets into his theater. For literature he cared nothing, of literary ambition knew nothing—just made plays, played them and flung away the manuscript. Even the sonnets were left unsigned—which is fortunate, for his unearthly signature would have misled the compiler.

Whatever may be the other qualities of "As You Like It," Mr. Shaw will perhaps admit that in point of mere decency it is pretty fair, which is more than any but a

Shakspearolater will say of "Romeo and Juliet," for example. Not greatly caring for the theater, I am not familiar with "acting versions," but this play as it came from the hand of its author is, in a moral sense, detestable. All its men are blackguards, all its women worse, and worst of all is Juliet herself, who makes no secret of the nature of her passion for Romeo, but discloses it with all the candor of a moral idiot insensible to the distinction between propensity and sentiment. Her frankness is no less than hideous. Yet one may read page after page by reputable authors in praise of her as one of the sweetest of Shakspeare's fascinating heroines. Babes are named for her and drawing-room walls adorned with ideal portraits of her, engraved from paintings of great artists. One has only to read Taine's description of an Elizabethan theater audience to understand why dramatists of those "spacious times" did not need seriously to concern themselves with morality; but that Shakspeare's wit, pathos and poetry can make such characters as those of this drama acceptable to modern playgoers and readers is the highest possible attestation of the man's consummate genius.

A DEAD LION

I

IN the history of religious controversy it has sometimes occurred that a fool has risen and shouted out views so typical and representative as to justify a particular attention denied to his less absurd partisans. That was the situation relative to the logomachy that raged over the ashes of the late Col. Robert Ingersoll. Through the ramp and roar of the churches, the thunder of the theological captains and the shouting, rose the penetrating treble of a person so artlessly pious, so devoid of knowledge and innocent of sense, that his every utterance credentialed him as a child of candor, and arrested attention like the wanton shrilling of a noontide locust cutting through the cackle of a hundred hens. That he happened to be an editorial writer was irrelevant, for it was impossible to suspect so ingenuous a soul of designs upon what may be called the Christian vote; he simply poured out his heart with the

unpremeditated sincerity of a wild ass uttering its view of the Scheme of Things. I take it the man was providentially "raised up," and spoke by inspiration of the Spirit of Religion.

"Robert G. Ingersoll," says this son of nature, "was not a great atheist, nor a great agnostic. Dissimilar though they are, he aspired in his published lectures and addresses to both distinctions."

As it is no distinction to be either atheist or agnostic, this must mean that Col. Ingersoll "aspired" to be a *great* atheist and a *great* agnostic. Where is the evidence? May not a man state his religious or irreligious views with the same presumption of modesty and mere sincerity that attaches to other intellectual action? Because one publicly affirms the inveracity of Moses must one be charged with ambition, that meanest of all motives? By denying the sufficiency of the evidences of immortality is one self-convicted of a desire to be accounted great?

Col. Ingersoll said the thing that he had to say, as I am saying this—as a clergyman preaches his sermon, as an historian writes his romance: partly for the exceeding great reward of expression, partly, it may be, for

214 THE COLLECTED WORKS

the lesser profit of payment. We all move along lines of least resistance; because a few of us find that this leads up to the temple of fame it does not follow that all are seeking that edifice with a conscious effort to achieve distinction. If any Americans have appraised at its true and contemptible value the applause of the people Robert Ingersoll did. If there has been but one such American he was the man.

Now listen to what further this ineffable dolt had to say of him:

His irreverence, however, his theory of deistical brutality, was a mere phantasy, unsustained by scholarship or by reason, and contradicted by every element of his personal character. His love for his wife and his children, his tenderness towards relatives and friends, would have been spurious and repulsive if in his heart he had not accepted what in speech he derided and contemned.

Here's richness indeed! Whatever may be said by scholarship and reason of a "theory of deistical brutality," I do not think—I really have not the civility to admit—that it is contradicted by a blameless life. If it were really true that the god of the Christians is not a particularly "nice" god the love of a man for wife and child would not neces-

sarily and because of that be spurious and repulsive. Indeed, in a world governed by such a god, and subject therefore to all the evils and perils of the divine caprice and mal-
evolence, such affection would be even more useful and commendable than it is in this actual world of peace, happiness and security. As the stars burn brightest in a moonless night, so in the gloom of a wrath-ruled universe all human affections and virtues would have an added worth and tenderness. In order that life might be splended with so noble and heroic sentiments as grow in the shadow of disaster and are nourished by the sense of a universal peril and sorrow, one could almost wish that some malign deity, omnipotent and therefore able to accomplish his purposes without sin and suffering for his children, had resisted the temptation to do so and had made this a Vale of Tears.

The Nineteenth Century has produced great agnostics. Strauss the German and Renan the Frenchman were specimens of this particular cult. But Robert G. Ingersoll belonged to a lower range of scholarship and of thought. He had never studied the great German and French critics of the Bible. His "Mistakes of Moses" were pervaded by misapprehensions of the text of the Pentateuch.

216 THE COLLECTED WORKS

It is indubitably true that Ingersoll was inferior in scholarship to Strauss and Renan, and in that and genius to the incomparable Voltaire; but these deficiencies were not disabilities in the work that he undertook. He knew his limitations and did not transgress them. He was not self-tempted into barren fields of scholastic controversy where common sense is sacrificed to "odious subtlety." In the work that he chose he had no use for the dry-as-dust erudition of the modern German school of Biblical criticism—learned, ingenious, profound, admirable and futile. He was accomplished in neither Hebrew nor Greek. Aramaic was to him an unknown tongue, and I dare say that if asked he would have replied that Jesus Christ, being a Jew, spoke Hebrew. The "text of the Pentateuch" was not "misapprehended" by him; he simply let it alone. What he criticised in "The Mistakes of Moses" is the English version. If that is not a true translation let those concerned to maintain its immunity from criticism amend it. They are not permitted to hold that it is good enough for belief and acceptance, but not good enough to justify an inexperienced dissent. Ingersoll's limitations were the source of his power; at least

they confined him to methods that are "understanded of the people"; and to be comprehended by the greatest number of men should be the wish of him who tries to destroy what he thinks a popular delusion. By the way, I observe everywhere the immemorial dog's-eared complaint that he could "tear down" (we Americans always prefer to say this when we mean pull down) but could not "build up." I am not aware that he ever tried to "build up." Believing that no religion was needful, he would have thought his work perfect if all religions had been effaced. The clamor of weak minds for something to replace the errors of which they may be deprived is one that the true iconoclast disregards. What he most endeavors to destroy is not idols, but idolatry. If in the place of the image that he breaks he set up another he would be like a physician who having cured his patient of a cramp should inoculate him with an itch. It is only just to say that the devout journalist whose holy utterance I am afflicting myself with the unhappiness of criticising nowhere makes the hoary accusation that Ingersoll could "tear down" but not "build up." He must have overlooked it.

218 THE COLLECTED WORKS

What Ingersoll attacked was the Bible as we have it—the English Bible—not the Bible as it may, can, must, might, would or should be in Hebrew and Greek. He had no controversy with scholars—not only knew himself unable to meet them on their own ground (where is plenty of room for their lonely feet) but was not at all concerned with their faiths and convictions, nor with the bases of them. Hoping to remove or weaken a few popular errors, he naturally examined the book in which he believed them to be found—the book which has the assent and acceptance of those who hold them and derive them from it. He did not go behind the record as it reads—nobody does excepting its advocates when it has been successfully impugned. What has influenced (mischievously, Ingersoll believed) the thought and character of the Anglo-Saxon race is not the Hebrew Scriptures and the Greek Testament, but the English Bible. The fidelity of that to its originals, its self-sufficiency and independence of such evidences as only scholarship can bring to its exposition, these, as Aristotle would say, are matters for separate consideration. If God has really chosen to give his law to his children in tongues that only an in-

infinitesimal fraction of them can hope to understand—has thrown it down amongst them for ignorant translators to misread, interested priesthoods to falsify and hardy and imaginative commentators to make ridiculous—has made no provision against all this debauching of the text and the spirit of it, this must be because he preferred it so; for whatever occurs must occur because the Omniscience and Omnipotence permitting it wishes it to occur. Such are not the methods of our human legislators, who take the utmost care that the laws be unambiguous, printed in the language of those who are required to obey them and accessible to them in the original text. I'm not saying that this is the better and more sensible way; I only say that if the former is God's way the fact relieves us all of any obligation to "restore" the text before discussing it and to illuminate its obscurities with the side-lights of erudition. Ingersoll had all the scholarship needful to his work: he knew the meaning of English words.

Says the complacent simpleton again:

It was idle for a man to deny the existence of God who confessed and proclaimed the principle of fraternity.
. . . The hard conception of annihilation had no

220 THE COLLECTED WORKS

place in sentences that were infused with the heat of immortality.

As logic, this has all the charm inhering in the syllogism, All cows are quadrupeds; this is a quadruped; therefore, this is a cow. The author of that first sentence would express his thought, naturally, something like this: All men are brothers; God is their only father; therefore, there is a God. The other sentence is devoid of meaning, and is quoted only to show the view that this literary lunatic is pleased to think that he entertains of annihilation. It is to him a "hard conception"; that is to say, the state of unconsciousness which he voluntarily and even eagerly embraces every night of his life, and in which he remained without discomfort for countless centuries before his birth, is a most undesirable state. It is, indeed, so very unwelcome that it shall not come to him—he'll not have it so. Out of nothingness he came, but into nothingness he will not return—he'll die first! Life is a new and delightful toy and, faith! he means to keep it. If you'd ask him he would say that his immortality is proved by his yearning for it; but men of sense know that we yearn, not for what we have, but for

what we have not, and most strongly for what we have not the shadow of a chance to get.

II

Mr. Harry Thurston Peck is different: he is a scholar, a professor of Latin in a leading college, an incisive if not very profound thinker, and a charming writer. He is a capable editor, too, and has conducted one of our foremost literary magazines, in which, as compelled by the nature of the business, he has commonly concerned himself mightily with the little men capering nimbly between yesterday the begetter and to-morrow the destroyer. Sometimes a larger figure strides into the field of his attention, but not for long, nor with any very notable accretion of clarity in the view. The lenses are not adjusted for large objects, which accordingly seem out of focus and give no true image. So the observer turns gladly to his ephemera, and we who read him are the gainers by his loyalty to his habit and to his public who fixed it upon him. But he so far transcended his limitations as to review in the late Col. Ingersoll's the work of a pretty large man. The result is, to many of Prof. Peck's admirers, of whom

222 THE COLLECTED WORKS

I am one, profoundly disappointing. In both spirit and method it suggests the question, Of what real use are the natural gifts, the acquirements and opportunities that do so little for the understanding? Surely one must sometimes dissent from the generally accepted appraisement of "the things we learn in college," when one observes a man like Prof. Peck (a collegian down to the bone tips) feeling and thinking after the fashion of a circuit-riding preacher in Southwestern Missouri. Let us examine some of his utterances about the great agnostic. Speaking of the purity of his personal character, this critic says:

No one has questioned this; and even had it been so questioned the fact could not be pertinent to our discussion. Indeed, it is not easy to perceive just why his private virtues have been so breathlessly brought forward and detailed with so much strenuous insistence; for surely husbands who are faithful, fathers who are loving, and friends who are generous and sympathetic are not so rare in this our world as to make of them phenomena to be noted in the annals of the age.

It seems to me entirely obvious why Ingersoll's friends and supporters have persisted in putting testimony on these matters into the forefront of the discussion; and entirely relev-

ant such testimony is. Churchmen and religionists in all ages and countries have affirmed the necessary and conspicuous immorality of the irreligious. No notable unbeliever has been safe from the slanders of the pulpit and the church press. And in this country to-day ninety-nine of every one hundred "professing Christians" hold that public and personal morality has no other basis than the Bible. In this they are both foolish and wise: foolish because it is so evidently untrue, and wise because to concede its untruth would be to abandon the defense of religion as a moral force. If men can be good without religion, and scorning religion, then it is not religion that makes men good; and if religion does not do this it is of no practical value and one may as well be without it as with it, so far as concerns one's relations with one's fellow men. We are told that Christianity is something more than a body of doctrine, that it is a system of ethics, having a divine origin; that it has a close and warm relation to conduct, generating elevated sentiments and urging to a noble and unselfish life. If in support of that view it is relevant to point to the blameless lives of its "Founder" and his followers it is equally relevant in contradiction

224 THE COLLECTED WORKS

to point to the blameless lives of its opponents. If Prof. Peck finds it "not easy to perceive" this he might profitably make some experiments in perception on a big, red Pennsylvanian barn.

Prof. Peck tries to be fair; he concedes the honesty of Ingersoll's belief and acknowledges that

It is entitled to the same respect that we accord to the unshaken faith of other men. Indeed, for the purpose of the moment we may even go still further and assume that he was right; that Christianity is in truth a superstition and its history a fable; that it has no hold on reason; and that the book from which it draws in part its teaching and its inspiration is only an inconsistent chronicle of old-world myths. Let us assume all this and let us still inquire what final judgment should be passed upon the man who held these views and strove so hard to make them universal.

Prof. Peck is not called upon to make any such concessions and assumptions. As counsel for the defense, I am as willing to make admissions as he, and "for the sake of argument," as the meaningless saying goes, to confess that the religion attacked by my client is indubitably true. His justification depends in no degree upon the accuracy of his judg-

ment, but upon his honest confidence in it; and that is unquestioned; that is no assumption; it is not conceded but affirmed. If he believed that in these matters he was right and a certain small minority of mankind, including a considerable majority of his living countrymen, wrong it was merely his duty as a gentleman to speak his views and to strive, as occasion offered or opportunity served, to "make them universal." In our personal affairs there is such a thing as righteous suppression of the truth—even such another thing as commendable falsehood. In certain circumstances avowal of convictions is as baleful and mischievous as in other circumstances dissimulation is. But in all the large matters of the mind—in philosophy, religion, science, art and the like, a lesser service to the race than utterance of the truth as he thinks he sees it, leaving the result to whatever powers may be, a man has no right to be content with having performed, for it is only so that truth is established. It was only so that Prof. Peck's religion was enthroned upon the ruins of others—among them one so beautiful that after centuries of effacement its myths and memories stir with a wonderful power the hearts of scholars and

226 THE COLLECTED WORKS

artists of the later and conquering faith. Of that religion it might once have been said in deprecation of St. Paul, as, in deprecation of Ingersoll, Prof. Peck now says of religion in general:

Its roots strike down into the very depths of human consciousness. They touch the heart, the sympathies and the emotions. They lay strong hold on life itself, and they are the chords to which all being can be made to vibrate with a passionate intensity which nothing else could call to life.

I have said that Prof. Peck tries to be fair; if he had altogether succeeded he would have pointed out, not only that Ingersoll sincerely believed the Christian religion false, but that he believed it mischievous, and that he was persuaded that its devotees would be better off with no religion than with any. Had Prof. Peck done that he could have spared himself the trouble of writing, and many of his admirers the pain of reading, his variants of the ancient and discreditable indictment of the wicked incapable who can "tear down," but not "build up." Agnosticism may be more than a mere negation. It may be, as in Ingersoll it was, a passionate devotion to Truth, a consecration of self to her service. Of such

a one as he it is incredibly false to say that he can only "destroy" and "has naught to give." As well and as truthfully could that be said of one who knocks away the chains of a slave and goes his way, imposing no others. One may err in doing so. There are as many breeds of men as of dogs and horses; and as a cur can not be taught to retrieve nor herd sheep, nor a roadster to hunt, so there are human tribes unfit for liberty. One's zeal in liberation may be greater than one's wisdom, but faith in all mankind is at least an honorable error, even when manifested by hammering at the shackles of the mind. What Ingersoll thought he had to "give" was Freedom—and that, I take it, is quite as positive and real as bondage. The reproach of "tearing down" without "building up" is valid against nobody but an idolatrous iconoclast. Ingersoll was different.

Prof. Peck has a deal to say against Ingersoll's methods; he does not think them sufficiently serious, not to say reverent. This objection may be met as Voltaire met it—by authorizing his critic to disregard the wit and answer the argument. But Prof. Peck will not admit that Ingersoll was witty. He sees nothing in his sallies but "buffoonery," a

word meaning wit directed against one's self or something that one respects. This amazing judgment from the mouth of one so witty himself could, but for one thing, be interpreted no otherwise than as evidence that he has not read the works that he condemns. That one thing is religious bigotry which, abundantly manifest everywhere in the article under review, is nowhere so conspicuous as in the intemperate, not to say low, language in which the charge of "buffoonery" is made. Who that has an open mind would think that it was written of Robert Ingersoll that he "burst into the sacred silence of their devotion with the raucous bellowing of an itinerant stump-speaker and the clowning of a vulgar mountebank"? To those who really know the character of Robert Ingersoll's wit—keen, bright and clean as an Arab's scimitar; to those who know the clear and penetrating mental insight of which such wit is the expression and the proof; to those who know how much of gold and how little of mud clung to the pebbles that he slung at the Goliaths of authority and superstition; to those who have noted the astonishing richness of his work in elevated sentiments fitly expressed, his opulence of memorable aphorism and his

fertility of felicitous phrase—to these it will not seem credible that such a man can be compared to one who, knowing the infidelity of a friend's wife, would “slap his friend upon the back and tell the story with a snicker, in the coarsest language of the brothel, interspersed with Rabelaisian jokes.” It is of the nature of wit mercifully to veil its splendors from the eyes of its victim. The taken thief sees in his captor an unheroic figure. The prisoner at the bar is not a good judge of the prosecution. But it is difficult distinctly to conceive a scholar, a wit, a critic, an accomplished editor of a literary magazine, committing himself to such judgments as these upon work accessible to examination and familiar to memory. To paraphrase Pope,

Who would not laugh if such a man there be?
Who would not weep if Harry Peck were he?

Another “point” that Prof. Peck is not ashamed to make is that Ingersoll lectured on religion for money—“in the character of a paid public entertainer, for his own personal profit.” And in what character, pray, does anybody lecture where there is a charge for admittance? In what character have some of

the world's greatest authors, scientists, artists and masters of crafts generally lectured when engaged to do so by "lyceums," "bureaus," or individual "managers"? In what character does Prof. Peck conduct his valuable and entertaining magazine for instruction and amusement of those willing to pay for it? In what character, indeed, does the Defender of the Faith put upon the market his austere sense of Ingersoll's cupidity?

Obviously the agnostic's offence was not lecturing for pay. It was not lecturing on religion. It was not sarcasm. It was that, lecturing for pay on religion, his sarcasm took a direction disagreeable to Prof. Peck, instead of disagreeable to Prof. Peck's opponents. As a ridiculer of infidels and agnostics Ingersoll might have made a great fame and not one of his present critics would have tried to dim its lustre with a breath, nor "with polluted finger tarnish it."

Religions are human institutions; at least those so hold who belong to none of "the two-and-seventy jarring sects." Religious faiths, like political and social, are entitled to no immunity from examination and criticism; all the methods and weapons that are legitimate against other institutions and beliefs are leg-

itimate against them. Their devotees have not the right to shield themselves behind some imaginary special privilege, to exact an exceptional exemption. A religion of divine origin would have a right to such exemption; its devotees might with some reason assist God to punish the crime of *lèse majesté*; but the divinity of the religion's origin is the very point in dispute, and in holding that it shall be settled his way as an assurance of peace its protagonist is guilty of a hardy and impenitent impudence. Blasphemy has been defined as speaking disrespectfully of *my* phemy; one does not observe among the followers of one faith any disposition to accord immunity from ridicule to the followers of another faith. The devoutest Christian can throw mud at Buddha without affecting his own good standing with the brethren; and if Mahomet were hanged in effigy from the cross of St. Paul's, Protestant Christianity would condemn the act merely as desecration of a sacred edifice.

Here is one more quotation from Prof. Peck, the concluding passage of his paper:

Robert Ingersoll is dead. Death came to him with swiftness and without a warning. Whether he was even conscious of his end no man can say. It may be that

232 THE COLLECTED WORKS

before the spark grew quite extinct there was for him a moment of perception—that one appalling moment when, within a space of time too brief for human contemplation, the affrighted mind, as it reels upon the brink, flashes its vivid thought through all the years of its existence and perceives the final meaning of them all. If such a moment came to him, and as the light of day grew dim before his dying eyes his mind looked backward through the past, there can have been small consolation in the thought, that in all the utterances of his public teaching, and in all the phrases of his fervid eloquence, there was nothing that could help to make the life of a man on earth more noble, or more spiritual, or more truly worth living.

This of a man who taught all the virtues as a duty and a delight!—who stood, as no other man among his countrymen has stood, for liberty, for honor, for good will toward men, for truth as it was given to him to see it, for love!—who by personal example taught patience under falsehood and silence under vilification!—who when slandered in debate answered not back, but addressed himself to the argument!—whose entire life was an inspiration to high thought and noble deed, and whose errors, if errors they are, the world can not afford to lose for the light and reason that are in them!

The passage quoted is not without elo-

quence and that literary distinction which its author gives to so much of what he writes. Withal it is infinitely discreditable. [There is in it a distinct undertone of malice—of the same spirit which, among bigots of less civility and franker speech, affirms of an irreligious person's sudden death that it was "a judgment of Heaven," and which gloats upon the possibility that he suffered the pangs of a penitence that came, thank God! too late to command salvation. It is in the same spirit that conceived and keeps in currency the tenthousand-times-disproved tales of the deathbed remorse of Thomas Paine, Voltaire and all the great infidels. Indubitably posterity will enjoy the advantage of believing the same thing of Ingersoll; and I can not help thinking that in suggesting his remorse as only a possibility, instead of relating it as a fact attested by piteous appeals for divine mercy, Prof. Peck has committed a sin of omission for which on his own deathbed he will himself suffer the keenest regret.

1899.

THE SHORT STORY

“**T**HE short story is always distinctly a sketch. It can not express what is the one greatest thing in all literature—intercommunion of human characters, their juxtapositions, their contrasts. . . . It is not a high form of art, and its present extreme popularity bespeaks decadence far more than advance.”

So said Edgar Fawcett, an author of no small note and consequence in his day. The one-greatest-things-in-all-literature are as plentiful and obvious, apparently, as the sole causes of the decline of the Roman power, yet new ones being continually discovered, it is a fair presumption that the supply is inexhaustible; and Fawcett, an ingenious man, could hardly have failed to find one and catalogue it. The one that he would discover was pretty sure to be as good as another and to abound in his own work—and Fawcett did not write short stories, but exceedingly long ones. So “the intercommunion of human

characters," and so forth, stands. Nevertheless, one fairly great thing in all literature is the power to interest the reader. Perhaps the author having the other thing can afford to forego that one, but its presence is observable, somehow, in much of the work that is devoid of that polyonymous element noted by Messrs. Fawcett, Thomas, Richard and Henry. Having that fact in mind, and the added fact that in his own admirable sonnets (for example) the intercommunion is an absent factor, I am disposed to think that Edgar was facetious.

The short story, quoth'a, "is not a high form of art"; and inferably the long story—the novel—is. Let us see about that. As all the arts are essentially one, addressing the same sensibilities, quickening the same emotions and subject to the same law and limitations of human attention, it may be helpful to consider some of the arts other than literary and see what we can educe from the comparison. It will be admitted, I hope, that even in its exterior aspect St. Peter's Church is a work of high art. But is Rome a work of high art? Was it ever, or could it by rebuilding be made such? Certainly not, and the reason is that it can not all take attention

at once. We may know that the several parts are coördinated and interrelated, but we do not discern and feel the coördination and interrelation. An opera, or an oratorio, that can be heard at a sitting may be artistic, but if in the manner of a Chinese play it were extended through the evenings of a week or a month what would it be? The only way to get unity of impression from a novel is to shut it up and look at the covers.

Not only is the novel, for the reason given, and for others, a faulty form of art, but because of its faultiness it has no permanent place in literature. In England it flourished less than a century and a half, beginning with Richardson and ending with Thackeray, since whose death no novels, probably, have been written that are worth attention; though as to this, one can not positively say, for of the incalculable multitude written only a few have been read by competent judges, and of these judges few indeed have uttered judgment that is of record. Novels are still produced in suspicious abundance and read with fatal acclaim but the novel of to-day has no art broader and better than that of its individual sentences—the art of style. That would serve if it had style.

Among the other reasons why the novel is both inartistic and impermanent is this—it is mere reporting. True, the reporter creates his plot, incidents and characters, but that itself is a fault, putting the work on a plane distinctly inferior to that of history. Attention is not long engaged by what could, but did not, occur to individuals; and it is a canon of the trade that nothing is to go into the novel that might not have occurred. “Probability”—which is but another name for the commonplace—is its keynote. When that is transgressed, as in the fiction of Scott and the greater fiction of Hugo, the work is romance, another and superior thing, addressed to higher faculties with a more imperious insistence. The singular inability to distinguish between the novel and the romance is one of criticism’s capital ineptitudes. It is like that of a naturalist who should make a single species of the squirrels and the larks. Equally with the novel, the short story may drag at each remove a lengthening chain of probability, but there are fewer removes. The short story does not, at least, cloy attention, confuse with overlaid impressions and efface its own effect.

Great work has been done in novels. That

is only to say that great writers have written them. But great writers may err in their choice of literary media, or may choose them wilfully for something else than their artistic possibilities. It may occur that an author of genius is more concerned for gain than excellence—for the nimble popularity that comes of following a literary fashion than for the sacred credentials to a slow renown. The acclamation of the multitude may be sweet in his ear, the clink of coins, heard in its pauses, grateful to his purse. To their gift of genius the gods add no security against its misdirection. I wish they did. I wish they would enjoin its diffusion in the novel, as for so many centuries they did by forbidding the novel to be. And what more than they gave might we not have had from Virgil, Dante, Tasso, Camoëns and Milton if they had not found the epic poem ready to their misguided hands? May there be in Elysium no beds of asphodel and moly for its hardy inventor, whether he was Homer or "another man of the same name."

The art of writing short stories for the magazines of the period can not be acquired. Success depends upon a kind of inability that must be "born into" one—it does not come

at call. The torch must be passed down the line by the thumbless hands of an illustrious line of prognathous ancestors unacquainted with fire. For the torch has neither light nor heat—is, in truth, fireproof. It radiates darkness and all shadows fall toward it. The magazine story must relate nothing: like Dr. Hern's "holes" in the luminiferous ether, it is something in which nothing can occur. True, if the thing is written in a "dialect" so abominable that no one of sense will read, or so unintelligible that none who reads will understand, it may relate something that only the writer's kindred spirits care to know; but if told in any human tongue action and incident are fatal to it. It must provoke neither thought nor emotion; it must only stir up from the shallows of its readers' understandings the sediment which they are pleased to call sentiment, murking all their mental pool and effacing the reflected images of their natural environment.

The master of this school of literature is Mr. Howells. Destitute of that supreme and almost sufficient literary endowment, imagination, he does, not what he would, but what he can—takes notes with his eyes and ears and "writes them up" as does any other re-

porter. He can tell nothing but something like what he has seen or heard, and in his personal progress through the rectangular streets and between the trim hedges of Philistia, with the lettered old maids of his acquaintance curtseying from the doorways, he has seen and heard nothing worth telling. Yet tell it he must and, having told, defend. For years he conducted a department of criticism with a purpose single to expounding the after-thought theories and principles which are the offspring of his own limitations.

Illustrations of these theories and principles he interpreted with tireless insistence as proofs that the art of fiction is to-day a finer art than that known to our benighted fathers. What did Scott, what did even Thackeray know of the subtle psychology of the dear old New England maidens?

I want to be fair: Mr. Howells has considerable abilities. He is insufferable only in fiction and when, in criticism, he is making fiction's laws with one eye upon his paper and the other upon a catalogue of his own novels. When not carrying that heavy load, himself, he has a manly enough mental stride. He is not upon very intimate terms with the English language, but on many subjects, and

when you least expect it of him, he thinks with such precision as momentarily to subdue a disobedient vocabulary and keep out the wrong word. Now and then he catches an accidental glimpse of his subject in a sidelight and tells with capital vivacity what it is not. The one thing that he never sees is the question that he has raised by inadvertence, deciding it by implication against his convictions. If Mr. Howells had never written fiction his criticism of novels would entertain, but the imagination which can conceive him as writing a good story under any circumstances would be a precious literary possession, enabling its owner to write a better one.

In point of fiction, all the magazines are as like as one vacuum to another, and every month they are the same as they were the month before, excepting that in their holiday numbers at the last of the year their vacuity is a trifle intensified by that essence of all dulness, the "Christmas story." To so infamous a stupidity has popular fiction fallen—to so low a taste is it addressed, that I verily believe it is read by those who write it!

As certain editors of newspapers appear to think that a trivial incident has investiture

of dignity and importance by being telegraphed across the continent, so these story-writers of the Reporter School hold that what is not interesting in life becomes interesting in letters—the acts, thoughts, feelings of commonplace people, the lives and loves of noodles, nobodies, ignoramuses and millionaires; of the village vulgarian, the rural maiden whose spiritual grace is not incompatible with the habit of falling over her own feet, the somnolent nigger, the clay-eating “Cracker” of the North Carolinian hills, the society person and the inhabitant of southwestern Missouri. Even when the writers commit infractions of their own literary Decalogue by making their creations and creationesses do something picturesque, or say something worth while, they becloud the miracle with such a multitude of insupportable descriptive details that the reader, like a tourist visiting an artificial waterfall at a New England summer place of last resort, pays through the nose at every step of his way to the Eighth Wonder. Are we given dialogue? It is not enough to report what was said, but the record must be authenticated by enumeration of the inanimate objects—commonly articles of furniture—which were privileged

to be present at the conversation. And each dialogian must make certain or uncertain movements of the limbs or eyes before and after saying his say. All this in such prodigal excess of the slender allusions required, when required at all, for *vraisemblance* as abundantly to prove its insertion for its own sake. Yet the inanimate surroundings are precisely like those whose presence bores us our whole lives through, and the movements are those which every human being makes every moment in which he has the misfortune to be awake. One would suppose that to these gentry and lady everything in the world except what is really remarkable is "rich and strange." They only think themselves able to make it so by the sea-change that it will suffer by being thrown into the duck-pond of an artificial imagination and thrown out again.

Amongst the laws which Cato Howells has given his little senate, and which his little senators would impose upon the rest of us, is an inhibitory statute against a breach of this "probability"—and to them nothing is probable outside the narrow domain of the commonplace man's most commonplace experience. It is not known to them that all men

244 THE COLLECTED WORKS

and women sometimes, many men and women frequently, and some men and women habitually, act from impenetrable motives and in a way that is consonant with nothing in their lives, characters and conditions. It is known to them that "truth is stranger than fiction," but not that this has any practical meaning or value in letters. It is to him of widest knowledge, of deepest feeling, of sharpest observation and insight, that life is most crowded with figures of heroic stature, with spirits of dream, with demons of the pit, with graves that yawn in pathways leading to the light, with existences not of earth, both malign and benign—ministers of grace and ministers of doom. The truest eye is that which discerns the shadow and the portent, the dead hands reaching, the light that is the heart of the darkness, the sky "with dreadful faces thronged and fiery arms." The truest ear is that which hears

Celestial voices to the midnight air,
Sole, or responsive each to the other's note,
Singing—

not "their great Creator," but not a negro melody, either; no, nor the latest favorite of

the drawing-room. In short, he to whom life is not picturesque, enchanting, astonishing, terrible, is denied the gift and faculty divine, and being no poet can write no prose. He can tell nothing because he knows nothing. He has not a speaking acquaintance with Nature (by which he means, in a vague general way, the vegetable kingdom) and can no more find

Her secret meaning in her deeds

than he can discern and expound the immutable law underlying coincidence.

Let us suppose that I have written a novel—which God forbid that I should do. In the last chapter my assistant hero learns that the hero-in-chief has supplanted him in the affections of the shero. He roams aimless about the streets of the sleeping city and follows his toes into a silent public square. There after appropriate mental agonies he resolves in the nobility of his soul to remove himself forever from a world where his presence can not fail to be disagreeable to the lady's conscience. He flings up his hands in mad disquietude and rushes down to the bay, where there is water enough to drown all

such as he. Does he throw himself in? Not he—no, indeed. He finds a tug lying there with steam up and, going aboard, descends to the fire-hold. Opening one of the iron doors of the furnace, which discloses an aperture just wide enough to admit him, he wriggles in upon the glowing coals and there, with never a cry, dies a cherry-red death of unquestionable ingenuity. With that the story ends and the critics begin.

It is easy to imagine what they say: "This is too much"; "it insults the reader's intelligence"; "it is hardly more shocking for its atrocity than disgusting for its cold-blooded and unnatural defiance of probability"; "art should have some traceable relation to the facts of human experience."

Well, that is exactly what occurred once in the stoke-hold of a tug lying at a wharf in San Francisco. *Only* the man had not been disappointed in love, nor disappointed at all. He was a cheerful sort of person, indubitably sane, ceremoniously civil and considerate enough (evidence of a good heart) to spare whom it might concern any written explanation defining his deed as "a rash act."

Probability? Nothing is so improbable as

what is true. It is the unexpected that occurs; but that is not saying enough; it is also the unlikely—one might almost say the impossible. John, for example, meets and marries Jane. John was born in Bombay of poor but detestable parents; Jane, the daughter of a gorgeous hidalgo, on a ship bound from Vladivostok to Buenos Ayres. Will some gentleman who has written a realistic novel in which something so nearly out of the common as a wedding was permitted to occur have the goodness to figure out what, at their birth, were the chances that John would meet and marry Jane? Not one in a thousand—not one in a million—not one in a million million! Considered from a view-point a little anterior in time, it was almost infinitely unlikely that any event which has occurred would occur—any event worth telling in a story. Everything being so unearthly improbable, I wonder that novelists of the Howells school have the audacity to relate anything at all. And right heartily do I wish they had not.

Fiction has nothing to say to probability; the capable writer gives it not a moment's attention, except to make what is related *seem* probable in the reading—*seem* true. Sup-

pose he relates the impossible; what then? Why, he has but passed over the line into the realm of romance, the kingdom of Scott, Defoe, Hawthorne, Beckford and the authors of the *Arabian Nights*—the land of the poets, the home of all that is good and lasting in the literature of the imagination. Do these little fellows, the so-called realists, ever think of the goodly company which they deny themselves by confining themselves to their clumsy feet and pursuing their stupid noses through the barren hitherland, while just beyond the Delectable Mountains lies in light the Valley of Dreams, with its tall immortals, poppy-crowned? Why, the society of the historians alone would be a distinction and a glory!

1897.

WHO ARE GREAT?

THE question having been asked whether Abraham Lincoln was the greatest man this country ever produced, a contemporary writer signifies his own view of the matter thus:

“Abraham Lincoln was a great man, but I am inclined to believe that history will reckon George Washington a greater.”

But that is an appeal to an incompetent arbiter. History has always elevated to primacy in greatness that kind of men—men of action, statesmen and soldiers. In my judgment neither of the men mentioned is entitled to the distinction. I should say that the greatest American that we know about, if not George Sterling, was Edgar Allan Poe. I should say that the greatest man is the man capable of doing the most exalted, the most lasting and most beneficial intellectual work—and the highest, ripest, richest fruit of the

human intellect is indubitably great poetry. The great poet is the king of men; compared with him, any other man is a peasant; compared with his, any other man's work is a joke. What is it likely that remote ages will think of the comparative greatness of Shakespeare and the most eminent of all Britain's warriors or statesmen? Nothing, for knowledge of the latter's work will have perished. Who was the greatest of Grecians before Homer? Because you are unable to mention offhand the names of illustrious conquerors or empire-builders of the period do you suppose there were none? Their work has perished, that is all—as will perish the work of Washington and Lincoln. But the *Iliad* is with us.

Their work has perished and our knowledge of it. Why? Because no greater man made a record of it. If Homer had celebrated their deeds instead of those of his dubious Agamemnon and impossible Achilles, we should know about them—all that he chose to tell. For a comparison between their greatness and his the data would be supplied by himself. Men of action owe their fame to men of thought. The glory of the ruler, the conqueror or the statesman belongs to the

historian or the poet who made it. He can make it big or little, at his pleasure; he upon whom it is bestowed is as powerless in the matter as is any bystander. If there were no writers how would you know that there was a Washington or a Lincoln? How would you know that there is a Joseph Choate, who was American Ambassador to Great Britain, or a Nelson Miles, sometime Commander of our army? Suppose the writers of this country had in 1896 agreed never again to mention the name of William J. Bryan; where would have been his greatness?

Great writers make great men or unmake them—or can if they like. They kindle a glory where they please, or quench it where it has begun to shine. History's final judgment of Washington and Lincoln will depend upon the will of the immortal author who chooses to write of them. Their deeds, although a thousand times more distinguished, their popularity, though a thousand times greater, can not save from oblivion even so much as their names. And nothing that they built will abide. Of the "topless towers" of empire that the one assisted to erect, and the other to buttress, not a vestige will remain. But what can efface "The Test-

imony of the Suns"? Who can unwrite "To Helen"?

If there had been no Washington, American independence would nevertheless have been won and the American republic established. But suppose that he alone had taken up arms. He was neither indispensable nor sufficient. Without Lincoln the great rebellion would have been subdued and negro slavery abolished. What kind of greatness is that—to do what another could have done, what was bound to be done anyhow? I call it pretty cheap work. Great statesmen and great soldiers are as common as flies; the world is lousy with them. We recognize their abundance in the saying that the hour brings the man. We do not say that of a literary emergency. There the demand is always calling for the supply, and usually calling in vain. Once or twice in a century, it may be, the great man of thought comes, unforeseen and unrecognized, and makes the age and the glory thereof all his own by saying what none but he could say—delivering a message which none but he could bear. All round him swarm the little great men of action, laying sturdily about them with mace and sword, changing boundaries which are

afterward changed back again, serving fascinating principles from which posterity turns away, building states that vanish like castles of cloud, founding thrones and dynasties with which Time plays at pitch-and-toss. But through it all, and after it all, the mighty thought of the man of words flows on and on with the resistless sweep of "the great river where De Soto lies"—an unchanging and unchangeable current of eternal good.

They say the Lion and the Lizard keep
The courts where Jamshyd gloried and drank deep;
And Bahram, that great Hunter—the wild ass
Stamps o'er his Head, but can not break his sleep.

But the courts that Omar reared still stand, perfect as when he "hewed the shaft and laid the architrave." Not the lion and the lizard—we ourselves keep them and glory in them and drink deep in them, as did he. O'er his head, too, that good man and considerable poet, Mr. Edgar Fawcett, stamped in vain; but a touch on a book, and lo! old Omar is broad awake and with him wakens Israfel, "whose heart-strings are a lute."

Art and literature are the only things of permanent interest in this world. Kings and

conquerors rise and fall; armies move across the stage of history and disappear in the wings; mighty empires are evolved and dissolved; religions, political systems, civilizations flourish, die and, except in so far as gifted authors may choose to perpetuate their memory, are forgotten and all is as before. But the thought of a great writer passes from civilization to civilization and is not lost, although his known work, his very name, may perish. You can not unthink a thought of Homer, but the deeds of Agamemnon are long undone, and the only value that he has, the only interest, is that he serves as material for poets. Of Cæsar's work only that of the pen survives. If a statue by Phidias, or a manuscript by Catullus, were discovered to-day the nations of Europe would be bidding against one another for its possession to-morrow—as one day the nations of Africa may bid for a newly discovered manuscript of some one now long dead and forgotten. Literature and art are about all that the world really cares for in the end; those who make them are not without justification in regarding themselves as masters in the House of Life and all others as their servitors. In the babble and clamor, the pranks and antics of

its countless incapables, the tremendous dignity of the profession of letters is overlooked; but when, casting a retrospective eye into "the dark backward and abysm of time" to where beyond these voices is the peace of desolation, we note the majesty of the few immortals and compare them with the pigmy figures of their contemporary kings, warriors and men of action generally—when across the silent battle fields and hushed *fora* where the dull destinies of nations were determined, nobody cares how, we hear,

like ocean on a western beach,
The surge and thunder of the Odyssey—

then we appraise literature at its true value; and how little worth while seems all else with which Man is pleased to occupy his fussy soul and futile hands!

1901.

POETRY AND VERSE

LOVE of poetry is universal, but this is not saying much; for men in general love it not as poetry, but as verse—the form in which it commonly finds utterance, and in which its utterance is most acceptable. Not that verse is essential to poetry; on the contrary, some of the finest poetry extant (some of the passages of the Book of Job, in the English version, for familiar examples) is neither metric nor rhythmic. I am not quite sure, indeed, but the best test of poetry yet discovered might not be its persistence or disappearance when clad in the garb of prose. In this opinion I differ, though with considerable reluctance, with General Lucius Foote, who asserts that “every feature which makes poetry to differ from prose is the result of expression.” This dictum he has fortified by but a single example: he puts a stanza of Tennyson’s “Charge of the Light Brigade” into very good prose. Now, for one who has at times come so perilously near to writing

genuine poetry as has General Foote, this is a little too bad. Surely no man of so competent literary judgment ever before affected to believe that Tennyson's resonant patriotic lines were poetry, in any sense. They are, however, a little less distant from it in General Foote's prose version—"There were some cannons on the right, and some on the left, and some in front, and they fired with a great noise"—than they are in the original. And I have the hardihood to add that as a rule the "old favorites" of the lyceum—the ringing and rhetorical curled darlings of the public—the "Address to the American Flag," "The Bells," the "Curfew Must Not Ring To-night," and all the ghastly lot of them, are very rubbishy stuff, indeed. There are exceptions, unfortunately, but to a cultivated taste—the taste of a mind that not only knows what it likes, but knows and can definitely state why it likes it—nine in ten of them are offensive. I say it is unfortunate that there are exceptions. It is unfortunate as impairing the beauty and symmetry of the rule, and unfortunate for the authors of the exceptional poems, who must endure through life the consciousness that their popularity is a cruel injustice.

Far be it from me to underrate the value of the delicate and difficult art of managing words. It is to poetry what color is to painting. The thought is the outline drawing, which, if it be great, no dauber who stops short of actually painting it out can make wholly mean, but to which the true artist with his pigments can add a higher glory and a new significance. No one who has studied style as a science and endeavored to practice it as an art; no one who knows how to select with subtle skill the word for the place; who balances one part of his sentence against another; who has an alert ear for the harmony of stops, cadences and inflections, orderly succession of accented syllables and recurrence of related sounds—no one, in short, who knows how to write prose can hold in light esteem an art so nearly allied to his own as that of poetic expression, including as it does the intricate one of versification, which itself embraces such a multitude of dainty wisdoms. But expression is not all; while, on the one hand, it can no more make a poetic idea prosaic than it can make falsehood of truth, so, on the other, it is unable to elevate and beautify a sentiment essentially vulgar or base. The experienced miner will

no more surely detect the presence of gold in the rough ore than a trained judgment the noble sentiment in the crude or ludicrous verbiage in which ignorance or humor may have cast it; and the terrier will with no keener nose penetrate the disguise of the rat that has rolled in a bed of camomile than the practiced intelligence detect the pauper thought masquerading in fine words. The mind that does not derive a quiet gratification from the bald statement that the course of the divine river Alph was through caves of unknown extent, whence it fell into a dark ocean, will hardly experience a thrill of delight when told by Coleridge that

Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man,
Down to a sunless sea.

Nor would one who is capable of physically feeling the lines,

Full many a glorious morning have I seen
Flatter the mountain tops with sovereign eye,

have disdained to be told by some lesser Shakspeare that he had observed mornings so fine that the mountains blushed with pleasure

260 THE COLLECTED WORKS

to be noticed by them. Poetry is too multi-form and many-sided for anyone to dogmatize upon single aspects and phases of it as if they were the whole; it has as many shapes as Proteus, and as many voices as a violin. It sometimes thunders and sometimes it prattles; it shouts and exults, but on occasion it can whisper. Crude and harsh at one time, the voice of the muse is at another smooth, soft, exquisite, luxurious; and again scholarly and polite. There is ornate poetry, like the façade of a Gothic cathedral, and there is poetry like a Doric temple. Poems there are which blaze like a parterre of all brilliant flowers, and others as chaste and pallid as the white lily. It is all good (though I hasten to explain with some alarm that I do not think all verse is good) but the best minds are best agreed in awarding the palm to poetry that is most severely simple in diction—in which are fewest “inversions”—from which words of new coinage and compounding are rigorously excluded, and the old are used in their familiar sense; poetry, that is to say, that differs least in expression from the best prose. A truly poetic line—a line that I never tire of repeating to myself—is this from Byron:

And the big rain comes dancing to the earth.

It is from the description of a storm in the Alps, in "Childe Harold." I will quote the whole stanza in order that the reader may be reminded how much of the excellence of this line depends upon its context:

And this is in the night—most glorious night!

Thou wert not sent for slumber! let me be

A sharer in thy fierce and far delight—

A portion of the tempest and of thee!

How the lit lake shines, a phosphoric sea,

And the big rain comes dancing to the earth!

And now again 'tis black—and now the glee

Of the loud hills shakes with its mountain-mirth,

As if they did rejoice o'er a young earthquake's birth.

It would not be difficult, were it worth while, to point out in this stanza almost as many faults as it has lines; after the "lit lake" the "phosphoric sea"—a simile that repeats the image and debauches it—is singularly execrable, and the "young earthquake's birth" is almost as bad; but all the imperfections of the stanza count for nothing, for they are redeemed by its merits, and particularly by that one splendid line. Yet how could the thought it holds be more baldly stated? I

only stipulate that the rain shall be "big," and "dancing" seem to be the manner of its approach. With these not very hard, and perfectly fair, conditions let ingenuity do its malevolent worst to vulgarize that thought. These few instances prove, I hope, that poetry, whatever it is, is something more than "words, words, words"—that there is such a thing as poetry of the thought.

But let us take a different kind of example. If poetry is all in the manner, as General Foote avers, expression must be able to create poetry out of anything; at least, no line has been drawn between the prosaic ideas upon which expression can work its miracle and those upon which it can not. I am, therefore, justified by a familiar law of logic in assuming that it is meant that expression, by the mere magic of method, can make *any* idea poetical. Now, I beg most respectfully to submit the following problems to be "worked out" by believers in that dictum: Make poetry of the thought that—

(1) Glue is made from the hoofs of cattle, and (2) silk purses by macerating the ears of sows in currant jelly.

If anyone will build a superstructure of poetry upon either of those "ideas" as a

foundation I will be first and loudest in calling attention to the glory of the edifice.

I have said that men in general do not love poetry as poetry, but as verse. They are pleased with verse, but if the verse contain poetry they like it none the better for that. To the vast majority of the readers of even the higher class newspapers, verse and poetry are terms strictly synonymous. The pleasure they get from metre and rhyme is merely physical or sensual. It is much the same kind of pleasure as that derived from the clatter of a drum and the rhythmic clash of cymbals, and altogether inferior to the delight that the other instruments of a band produce. Emerson, I believe, accounts for our delight in metrical composition by supposing metre to have some close relation to the rhythmical recurrences within our physical organization—respiration, the pulse-beat, etc. No doubt he is right, and if so we need not take the trouble to deride the easy-going intellect that is satisfied with sound for sentiment whenever the sound is in harmony with the physical nature that perceives it, for in such sounds is a natural charm. The old lady who found so much Christian comfort in pronouncing the word "Mesopotamia" was no-

264 THE COLLECTED WORKS

body's fool; the word consists of two pure dactyls.

For an example of the satisfaction the ordinary mind takes in mere metre there is nothing better than the senseless refrains of popular songs—things which make not even the pretense of containing ideas. From the “hey ding a ding” of Shakspeare and the “luddy, fuddy,” etc., of Mr. Lester Wal-lack’s famous thieves’ song in “Rosedale,” to the “whack fol-de-rol” of inferior and less original composers, they are all alike in appealing to nothing in the world but the sense of time. And in this they differ in no essential particular from the verses in the newspapers; for such ideas as these contain—and God knows they are harmless—are probably never perfectly grasped by the reader, who, when he has finished his “poem,” is very sure to be unable to tell you what it is all about. I have proved this by repeated experiments, and I believe I am not far wrong on the side of immoderation in saying that of every one hundred adults who can read and write with ease, there are ninety and nine to whom poetry is a sealed book—who not only do not recognize it when read, but do not understand it when pointed out. There is hardly

any subject on which the ignorance of educated persons is more deep, dark and universal. And in one sense it is hopeless. By no set instruction can a knowledge of poetry be gained. It is (to those having the capacity) a result of general refinement—the fruit of a taste and judgment that come of culture. The difficulty of imparting it is immensely enhanced by the want of a definition. If one have gift and knowledge it is easy enough to say what is poetry, but not so easy to say what poetry is.

Hunters have a saying that a deer is safe from the man that never misses. Likewise it may be said that the faultless poet gets no readers; for, as the hunter can never miss only by never firing, so the poet can avoid faults only by not writing. There is no such thing in art or letters as attainable perfection; the utmost that any man can hope to do is to make the sum and importance of his excellences so exceed the sum and importance of his faults that the general impression shall seem faultless—that the good shall divert attention from the bad in the contemplation and efface it in the recollection. In considering the character of a particular work and assigning it to its true place amongst works of sim-

ilar scope and design, we must, indeed, balance merits against demerits, endeavoring in such a general way as the nature of the problem permits, to say which preponderate, and to what extent, making allowance in censure and modification in praise. But the author of the work is to be rightly judged by a different method, and he who has done great work is great, despite the number and magnitude of his failures and imperfections. These may serve to point a moral or illustrate a principle by its violation, but they do not and can not dim the glory of the better performance. Is he not a strong man who can lift a thousand pounds, notwithstanding that in acquiring the ability he failed a hundred times to lift the half of it? Who was the strongest man in the world—he who once lifted the greatest weight, or he who twice lifted the second greatest? The author of "Paradise Lost" wrote afterward "Paradise Regained." He who wrote a poem called "In Memoriam" wrote a thing called "The Northern Farmer." Of what significance is that? Shall we count also a man's washing-list against him? Suppose that Byron had not written the "Hours of Idleness"—would that have enhanced the value of "Childe

Harold"? Is our hoard of Shakspearean pure gold the smaller because from the mine whence it came came also some of the base metal of "Titus Andronicus"? Surely it does not matter whether the hand that at one time wrote the lines "To Helen" was at another time writing "The Bells" or whittling a pine shingle. Literature is not like a game of billiards, in which the player is rated according to his average. In estimating the relative altitudes of mountain peaks we look no lower than their summits.

In judging men by this broader method than that which we apply to their work we do but practice that method whereby posterity arrives at judgments so just and true that in their prediction consists the whole science of criticism. To anticipate the verdict of posterity—that is all the most daring critic aspires to do, and to do that he should strive to exclude the evidence that posterity will not hear. Posterity is a tribunal in which there will be no testimony for the prosecution except what is inseparable from the strongest testimony for the defence. It will consider no man's bad work, for none will be extant. Nay, it will not even attend to the palliating or aggravating circumstances of his life and

268 THE COLLECTED WORKS

surroundings, for these too will have been forgotten; if not lost from the records they will be whelmed under mountains of similar or more important matter—Pelion upon Ossa of accumulated “literary materials.”

These are points to which the critics do not sufficiently attend—do not, indeed, attend at all. They endeavor to anticipate the judgment of posterity by a method as unlike posterity's as their judgment and ingenuity can make it. They attentively study their poet's private life and his relation to the time and its events in which he lived. They go to his work for the key to his character, and return to his character for the key to his work, then ransack his correspondence for side-lights on both. They paw dusty records and forgotten archives; they thumb and dog's-ear the libraries; and he who can turn up an original document or hitherto unnoted fact exults in the possession of an advantage over his fellows that will justify the publication of another volume to befog the question. Then comes posterity, calmly overlooks the entire mass of ingenious irrelevance, fixes a tranquil eye upon those lines which the poet has inscribed the highest, and determines his mental stature as simply, as surely and with as

little assistance as Daniel discerning the hand of God in the letters blazing upon the palace wall.

II

The world is nearly all discovered, mapped and described. In the hot hearts of two continents, and the "thrilling regions of thick-ribbed ice" about the poles, uncertainty still holds sway over a lessening domain, and there Fancy waves her joyous wing unclipped by knowledge. As in the material world, so in the world of mind. The daring incursions of conjecture have been followed and discredited by the encroachments of science, whereby the limits of the unknown have been narrowed to such mean dimensions that imagination has lost her free, exultant stride, and moves with mincing step and hesitating heart.

I do not mean to say that to-day knows much more that is worth knowing than did yesterday, but that with regard to poetry's materials—the visible and audible without us, and the emotional within—we have compelled a revelation of Nature's secrets, and found them uninteresting to the last degree. To the modern "instructed understanding"

she has something of the air of a detected impostor, and her worshipers have neither the sincerity that comes from faith, nor the enthusiasm that is the speech of sincerity. The ancients not only had, as Dr. Johnson said, "the first rifling of the beauties of Nature"; they had the immensely greater art advantage of ignorance of her dull, vulgar and hideous processes, her elaborate movements tending nowhither, and the aimless monotony of her mutations. The telescope had not pursued her to the heights, nor the microscope dragged her from her ambush. The meteorologists had not analyzed her temper, nor constructed mathematical formulæ to forecast her smiles and frowns. Mr. Edison had not arrived to show that the divine gift of speech (about the only thing that distinguishes men, parrots, and magpies from the brutes) is also an attribute of metal. In the youth of the world they had, in short, none of the disillusionizing sciences with which a critical age, delving curiously about the roots of things, has sapped the substructure of religion and art alike. I do not regret the substitution of knowledge for conjecture, and doubt for faith; I only say that it has its disadvantages, and among them we reckon the decay of

poesy. In an enlightened age, Macaulay says,

Men will judge and compare; but they will not create. They will talk about the old poets, and comment on them, and to a certain extent enjoy them. But they will scarcely be able to conceive the effect which poetry produced on their ruder ancestors, the agony, the ecstasy, the plenitude of belief. The Greek rhapsodists, according to Plato, could scarce recite Homer without falling into convulsions. The Mohawk hardly feels the scalping-knife while he shouts his death-song. The power which the ancient bards of Wales and Germany exercised over their auditors seems to modern readers almost miraculous. Such feelings are very rare in a civilized community, and most rare among those who participate most in its improvements. They linger among the peasantry.

While it is true in a large sense that the world's greatest poets have lived in rude ages, when their races were not long emerged from the night of barbarism—like birds the poets sing best at sunrise—it must not be supposed that similarly favorable conditions are supplied to a rude individual intelligence in an age of polish. With a barbarous age that had recently set its face to the dawn a Joaquin Miller would have been in full sympathy, and might have interpreted its spirit

272 THE COLLECTED WORKS

in songs of exceeding splendor. But the very qualities that would have made him *en rapport* with such an era make him an isolated voice in ours; while Tennyson, the man of culture, full of the disposition of his time—albeit the same is of less adequate vitality—touches with a valid hand the harp which the other beats in vain. The altar is growing cold, the temple itself becoming a ruin; the divine mandate comes with so feeble and faltering a voice that the priest has need of a trained and practiced ear to catch it and the gift of tongues to impart its meaning to a generation concerned with the unholy things whose voice is prose. As a poetical mental attitude, that of doubt is meaner than that of faith, that of speculation less commanding than that of emotion; yet the poet of to-day must assume them, and “In Memoriam” attests the wisdom of him who “stoops to conquer”—loyally accepting the hard conditions of his epoch, and bending his corrigible genius in unquestioning assent to the three thousand and thirty-nine articles of doubt.

As inspiration grows weak and acceptance disobedient, form of delivery becomes of greater moment; in so far as it can, the munificence of manner must mitigate the poverty

of matter; so it occurs that the poets of later life excel their predecessors in the delicate and difficult arts and artifices of versification as much as they fall below them in imagination and power.

1878.

THOUGHT AND FEELING

“**W**HAT is his idea?—what thought does he express?” asks—rather loftily—a distinguished critic and professor of English literature to whom I submitted a brief poem of Mr. Loveman. I had not known that Mr. Loveman (of whom, by the way, I have not heard so much as I expect to) had tried to express a thought; I had supposed that his aim was to produce an emotion, a feeling. That is all that a poet—as a poet—can do. He may be philosopher as well as poet—may have a thought, as profound a thought as you please, but if he do not express it so as to produce an emotion in an emotional mind he has not spoken as a poet speaks. It is the philosopher’s trade to make us think, the poet’s to make us feel. If he is so fortunate as to have his thought, well and good; he can make us feel, with it as well as without—and without it as well as with.

One would not care to give up the philosophy that underruns so much of Shakspeare’s

work, but how little its occasional absence affects our delight is shown by the reading of such "nonsense verses" as the song in "As You Like It," beginning:

It was a lover and his lass,
With a hey, and a ho, and a hey nonino.

One does not need the music; the lines sing themselves, and are full of the very spirit of poetry. What the dickens they may chance to mean is quite another matter. What is poetry, anyhow, but "glorious nonsense"? But how very glorious the nonsense happens to be! What "thought" did Ariel try to express in his songs in "The Tempest"? There is hardly the tenth part of a thought in them; yet who that has a rudimentary, or even a vestigial, susceptibility to sentiment and feeling, can read them without the thrill that is stubborn to the summoning of the profoundest reflections of Hamlet in his inkiest cloak?

Poetry may be conjoined with thought. In the great poets it commonly is—that is to say, we award the palm to him who is great in more than one direction. But the poetry is a thing apart from the thought and demanding a separate consideration. The two have no

276 THE COLLECTED WORKS

more essential connection than the temple and its granite, the statue and its bronze. Is the sculptor's work less great in the clay than it becomes in the hands of the foundry man?

No one, not the greatest poet nor the dullest critic, knows what poetry is. No man, from Milton down to the acutest and most pernicious lexicographer, has been able to define its name. To catch that butterfly the critic's net is not fine enough by much. Like electricity, it is felt, not known. If it could be known, if the secret were accessible to analysis, why, one could be taught to write poetry without having been "born unto singing."

So it happens that the most penetrating criticism must leave eternally unsaid the thing that is most worth saying. We can say of a poem as of a picture, an Ionic column, or any work of art: "It is charming!" But why and how it charms—there we are dumb, its creator no less than another.

What is it in art before which all but the unconscious peasant and the impenitent critic confess the futility of speech? Why does a certain disposition of words affect us deeply when if differently arranged to mean the same thing they stir no emotion whatever? He

who can answer that has surprised the secret of the Sphinx, and after him shall be no more poetry forever!

Expound who is able the charm of these lines from "Kubla Khan:"

A damsel with a dulcimer
In a vision once I saw.
It was an Abyssinian maid,
And on her dulcimer she played,
Singing of Mount Abora.

There is no "thought" here—nothing but the baldest narrative in common words arranged in their natural order; but upon whose heart-strings does not that maiden play?—and who does not adore her?

Like the entire poem of which they are a part, and like the entire product of which the poem is a part, the lines are all imagination and emotion. They address, not the intellect, but the heart. Let the analyst of poetry wrestle with them if he is eager to be thrown.

1903.

THE TIMOROUS REPORTER

THE PASSING OF SATIRE

“**Y**OUNG man,” said the Melancholy Author, “I do not commonly permit myself to be ‘interviewed’; what paper do you represent?”

The Timorous Reporter spoke the name of the great journal that was connected with him.

“I never have heard of it,” said the Melancholy Author. “I trust that it is devoted to the interests of Literature.”

Assurance was given that it had a Poets’ Corner and that among its regular contributors it numbered both Aurora Angelina Aylmer and Plantagenet Binks, the satirist.

“Indeed,” said the great man, “you surprise me! I had supposed that satire, once so large and wholesome an element in English letters, was long dead and d—— pardon me—buried. You must bear with me if I do not concede the existence of Mr. Binks. Satire cannot co-exist with so foolish sentiments

282 THE COLLECTED WORKS

as 'the brotherhood of man,' 'the trusteeship of wealth,' moral irresponsibility, tolerance, Socialism and the rest of it. Who can 'lash the rascals naked through the world' in an age that holds crime to be a disease, and converts the prison into a sanitarium?"

The Timorous Reporter ventured to ask if he considered crime a symptom of mental health. By way of fortifying himself for a reply, the melancholy one visited the side-board and topped a merciless quantity of something imperfectly known to his visitor from the arid South.

"Crime, sir," said he, partly recovering, "is merely a high degree of selfishness directed by a low degree of intelligence. If selfishness is a disease none of us is altogether well. We are all selfish, or we should not be living, but most of us have the discernment to see that our permanent advantage does not lie in gratification of our malevolence by murder, nor in augmenting our possessions by theft. Those of us who think otherwise should be assisted to a saner view by punishment. It is sad, so sad, to reflect that many of us escape it."

"But it is agreed," said the journalist, "by all our illustrious sociologists—Brand Whit-

lock, Clarence Darrow, Eugene Debs and Emma Goldman—that punishment is useless, that it does not deter; and they prove it by the number of convictions recorded against individual criminals. Will you kindly say if they are right?”

“They know that punishment deters—not perfectly, for nothing is perfect, but it deters. If every human institution that lamentably fails to accomplish its full purpose is to be abolished none will remain.”

The Timorous Reporter begged to be considered worthy to know what, apart from its great wisdom and interest, all this had to do with satire.

“Satire,” said the Melancholy Author, “is punishment. As such it has fallen into public disfavor through disbelief in its justice and efficacy. So the rascals go unlashd. Instead of ridicule we have solemn reprobation; for wit we have ‘humor’—with a slang word in the first line, two in the second and three in the third. Why, sir, the American reading public hardly knows that there ever was a distinctive kind of writing known, technically, as satire—that it was once not only a glory to literature but, incidentally, a terror to all manner of civic and personal unworth. If

we had to-day an Aristophanes, a Jonathan Swift or an Alexander Pope, he would indubitably be put into a comfortable prison with all sanitary advantages, fed upon yellow-legged pullets and ensainted by the Little Brothers of the Bad. For they would think him a thief. In the same error, the churches would pray for him and the women compete for his hand in marriage."

The thought of so great a perversion of justice overcame the creator of the vision and he sank into a chair already occupied by the cat—a contested seat.

SOME DISADVANTAGES OF
GENIUS

“**M**Y CHILD,” said the Melancholy Author, “the sharpest affliction besetting a man of genius is genius.”

The Timorous Reporter ventured to explain that he had been taught otherwise.

“In the first place,” continued the Melancholy Author, inattentive to dissent, “the man of genius cannot hope to be understood by his contemporaries. The more they concede his genius, the less will they comprehend any particular manifestation of it. Carlyle has said that the first impression of a work of genius is disagreeable. There are magazines and publishing houses that say they receive as many as twenty-five thousand manuscripts a year. Of course, as Dr. Holmes pointed out, one does not have to eat an entire cheese to know if he likes it—it is needless to read all manuscripts through to the bitter end. But how if in those that are really

great the apparently bitter end is the beginning? If the first impression is disagreeable—to one who is *not* a genius, just an editor—what chance of acceptance has the work?”

Not daring to affirm his steadfast conviction that all editors are men of genius, the interviewer suffered in (and from) silence, and the great man went on:

“Furthermore, the work of a man of genius is necessarily different from that of all others; by that difference, indeed, it is credentialed—to posterity—as a work of genius. But the editor, or the publisher’s reader—will he feel sure of his ground when dealing with that to which he is unaccustomed?—of whose acceptability to the public he is without the *criteria* to judge? With an abiding though secret sense of his own fallibility, will he not think it expedient to take the safe side and reject the work? That will at least entail no possible ‘difference of opinion’ with his employer. Dead manuscripts tell no tales. Sir, in the noble profession of letters it is the rule, attested by a thousand familiar instances, that the man of genius is starved by those whose successors in the seats of authority pay enormous prices for any scrap of his work that may survive him. Consider the

case of Poe, of Lafcadio Hearn—who confessed that in the last dozen years of his life his average annual earnings by his pen did not exceed five hundred dollars. And I am no millionaire myself.”

As the Melancholy Author paused to celebrate his poverty at the sideboard his auditor cautiously advanced the view that several living writers of indubitable genius were pretty prosperous.

“Despite their genius,” said the great man, drying his lips with his coat-sleeve, “and because of something else. One of them may have the good fortune to take the attention of some distinguished person having the world’s ear at his tongue’s end, and the habit of loquacity—a person like Colonel Roosevelt, or the late Mr. Gladstone. Did not the latter, by a few words of commendation, provide for life for Mrs. Humphry Ward and for eternity for Marie Bashkirtseff? True, the one is impenitently dull and the other was a shrilling lunatic; but by accident he *might* have praised an author of consummate ability. Another really great writer may be prosperous—that is to say, popular—because of some engaging mannerism or artifice; as Mr. Kipling bends from his Olympian om-

288 THE COLLECTED WORKS

niscience to flatter his readers with colloquial familiarity. Another, like Dickens, may have the good luck to be an amusing vulgarian, or, like Mr. Riley, be willing to write lyrics of the pumpkin-field in the 'dialect' of those who eat pumpkins. It may happen, too, although in point of fact it never does happen, that a man of genius is at the little end of a long, brass trumpet—I mean, is editor of Our Leading Magazine. Even conceding your entire claim for these fortunate persons (which I do not) it is clear that their genius has had nothing to do with their success. You are a hebetudinous futilitarian!"

The Timorous Reporter "shrank to his second cause and was no more." On reviving, he humbly submitted that he had affirmed nothing of the authors named, nor even mentioned them.

"Genius has been a thousand times defined," resumed the oracle, regardless; "nevertheless we know fairly well what, partly, it is. *Inter alia*, it is the faculty of knowing things without having to learn them. When Hugo wrote his immortal narrative of Waterloo he had never seen a battle; nor was Dickens ever in solitary confinement in the Pennsylvania penitentiary. But will the pos-

essor of this miraculous faculty profit by it, or even be able rightly to use it in the service of another's gain? No; in his dealings with his fellow men, editors and publishers included, he will find them unaware, and unable to perceive, that he knows any more than they do. He will encounter, indeed, the most insuperable distrust, even from those who concede his genius; for genius is almost universally held to be a particular kind of brilliant disability. The story of Homer instructing the sandal-maker how to make foot-gear is, of course, apocryphal, but no more credence is given to the authentic instance of Lord Brougham showing the brewer how to make beer. Even those who assent to the best definition of genius ever made—'great general ability directed into a particular channel'—will unconsciously assume that it is confined to that channel, and will assist in keeping it there. Its most distinguishing feature—versatility—the power to do many kinds of work equally well—will get no contemporary recognition. Having a reputation for writing great stories (for example) you will write equally great essays, satires and what not, all in vain. It is only to mediocrity that 'great general ability' is con-

ceded. That is why the late William Sharp, turning to another kind of work than that in which he had distinguished himself, took a feminine name, and, secure from disparaging comparison with himself, was accessible to commendation. As the work of William Sharp, that of 'Fiona McLeod' would have evoked a chorus of deprecation as evidence of failing power. In literature, a single specialty is all that contemporary criticism is willing to allow to genius. Posterity tells a juster tale, albeit disposed to go to the other extreme, seeing something of the fire divine in even the paste jewels wherewith the great lapidary pelted the wolf from his door."

"Then you would advise the writer of distinction to stick to his—latest?"

"That will not save him. The criticism that will not concede versatility will deny stability. After a few years, the man of genius, however he may confine himself to the kind of work in which, despite its excellence, he has been successful, must face the inevitable and solemn judgment that he has 'exhausted the vein,' 'fallen down,' 'gone stale.' It matters not if practice and years have ripened his imagination, broadened his knowledge and refined his taste—for great minds

do not decay with age; his contemporaries will have it that he is 'written out,' for he is no longer a new thing under the sun."

The Melancholy Author himself looks hardly more than seventy-five.

"'Written out, written out'—England said so of Dickens and Tennyson; America said so of Bret Harte; both have for five years been saying so of Kipling. The great writer is likely, by the way, to share that view himself, as Thackeray, reading over some of his early work, exclaimed: 'What a giant I was in those days!'

"Another lion in the path of genius is its own success—the low kind of success that is called popularity, for which some sons of the gods, with their bellies sticking to their backs, really do strive. Let one of them achieve a result of this kind and he will find it all the harder to achieve another. Read Stockton's story of 'My Wife's Deceased Sister.' The narrator tells how, having published a popular tale with that title, he was ever thereafter what is called in the slang to which your detestable profession is addicted, 'a dead one.' Editors would take nothing that he offered, but always begged for something like 'My Wife's Deceased Sister.' Sir, I know

292 THE COLLECTED WORKS

how it feels to go up against that invincible competitor, oneself. After publication of my famous story, 'The Maiden Pirate,' my greater (and even longer) work, 'A Treatise on the Chaldean Dative Case,' was rejected by twenty editors! Let the man of genius beware of popularity; one slip of that kind and a brilliant future is behind him. But it does not greatly matter, for even without incurring the mischance of a 'hit,' the great writer is, as I said, foredoomed to the charge of degeneracy."

The Timorous Reporter humbly murmured the names of Hall Caine, Henry James, the late F. Marion Crawford, Mrs. Mary Wilkins Freeman, Miss Mary Murrefree, Miss Mary Edward Bok, Ella Wheeler Wilcox, Ella Wheeler Sylvester Vierick, and the venerable Hildegard Hawthorne—then edged himself softly toward an open door. With unforeseen resourcefulness, the sad-eyed deprecator of dissent seized a convenient missile, but it happened to be a decanter of Medford rum, and the situation was saved. With fortified solemnity the father of the maiden pirate again took up his parable:

"Certain literary domains are posted with warnings to the trespasser, and against men

of genius the inhibition is fiercely enforced. Irruptions of mediocrity entail no penalty because unobserved by the constabulary. The supposed proprietors of these guarded estates are long dead, leaving no heirs; the 'notices' are put up without authority, for the land is really a common. One of these closed areas is that of Jonathan Swift, who dispossessed some of the successors of Lucian. Whom Lucian dispossessed we do not know, all evidences of an earlier occupancy than his having been effaced by the burning of the great library at Alexandria. All, doubtless, incurred 'the penalty of the law,' each in his turn, from the dunces of his day. The 'penalty' is execration as an imitator. Long before Swift, and probably long before Lucian, an accepted method of satire was comparison of actual with imaginary civilizations, through tales of fictitious travelers in unreal regions. But since Swift, woe to the writer having the hardihood to adopt the method, however candidly avowed, and however different the manner! It is as if guardians of Homer's fame had chased Dante and Camoëns out of the field of the epic, and had put up the bars against Milton. Nay, it is as if an engineer platting a survey were accused of imitating

Euclid. True, Virgil, who did imitate Homer most shamelessly, escapes censure. I fancy the Proponents-Militant of Originality have not heard of him.

"In our own day Bret Harte wrote charming sketches of life and character in Californian mining camps. Many others had done so before him, but for many years after his first work in that field none could enter it without incurring austere denunciation as imitator and plagiarist; and even to-day one having the experience to observe or the genius to imagine the life of a Californian mining camp, or any interesting feature of it, delivers his tidings, like the heralds of old, at his peril.

"Another of these posted preserves is that of satire in iambic pentameter verse. This mode of expression is supposed to belong by right divine to Alexander Pope, who made the most constant and cleverest use of it. With its concomitants of epigram and antithesis, it was old before Pope was young. He was himself a 'trespasser'; he was roundly reviled for imitating Dryden. The form was used by other Queen Anne's men, acceptably by Johnson and by many a later; but of this the patrolmen and gatekeepers of the

Pope reservation in our day have not been apprised by 'report divine'—the only way that they can be made to know anything, for read, the devil a bit do they. In the literary landscape they see only the highest peaks of the Delectable Mountains. They know only the large, familiar figures, and these only by their most characteristic work. To their indurated understandings each individual of this bright band stands for a particular field of composition. His title to exclusive possession is *res adjudicata*. If anybody set foot across the sacred boundary—little fellows excepted—he will find himself the fundamental element in a cone of pummeling custodians. Young man, in your report of this interview you will be good enough to quote me as deprecating that situation."

The interviewer pledged his life, his sacred fortune and his honor to the performance of that duty, and the great man resumed:

"Of all these inhibiting *censores literarum*, the most austere and implacable are those guarding the sovereignty of Poe. They have made his area of activity a veritable *mare clausam*—as if he were

the first that ever burst
Into that silent sea.

The Timorous Reporter signified his sense of the speaker's fertility of metaphor: there had been an inundation (of words) and the "estate" had become a "sea." He whistled softly "A Life on the Ocean Wave."

"It was not an unknown sea; it was crisscrossed by the wakes of a thousand ships and charted to the last reef. Tales of the tragic and the supernatural are the earliest utterances in every literature. When the savage begins to talk he begins to tell wonder tales of death and mystery—of terror and the occult. Tapping, as they do, two of the three great mother-lodes of human interest, these tales are a constant phenomenon—the most permanent, because the most fascinating, element in letters. Great Scott! has the patrol never heard of *The Thousand and One Nights*, of *The Three Spaniards*, of Horace Walpole, of 'Monk' Lewis, of De Quincey, of Maturin, Ingemann, Blicher, Balzac, Hoffmann, Fitz James O'Brien?"

The reporter summoned the boldness to say that the charge of imitation had not been made against De Maupassant, who certainly was not an unobserved "little fellow," and was contemporary with the offending critics.

"Why, sir," said the Melancholy Author,

"you forget—he wrote in French. Translations? Dear me, have there been translations? How sad!

"As to 'originality,' that is merely a matter of manner. The ancients exhausted the possibilities of method. In respect of that, one cannot hope to do much that is both new and worth doing, but there are as many styles—that is, ways of doing—as writers. One can no more help having some individuality in manner than one can help looking somewhat different from anybody else, although hopeless of being much of a giant, or unique as to number and distribution of arms, legs and head. But, sir, this demand for 'originality' is a call for third-rate men, who alone supply such a semblance of it as is still possible. The writer of sane understanding and wholesome ambition is content to meet his great predecessors on their own ground. He enters the public stadium, and although perversely handicapped because of his no record and mocked by the *claque*; and although the spectators are sure to declare him beaten, that ultimate umpire, Posterity, will figure the matter out, and may announce a different result."

The reporter has reason to think that much

298 THE COLLECTED WORKS

more was said, but he had the misfortune to fall asleep; and when wakened by the sound of a closing door he was alone. "My!" he said; "I have had a narrow escape; if the man that once proclaimed me a genius had not happened to be a fool I know not what evils might have befallen me."

1909.

OUR SACROSANCT ORTHO-
GRAPHY

“**N**O,” said the Melancholy Author, “I do not understand British criticism of American attempts at spelling reform. The claim of our insular cousins to a special ownership and particular custody of our language is impudent. English is not a benefaction that we owe to living Englishmen, nor a loan to be enjoyed, under conditions prescribed by the creditors. When our ancestors ‘came over’ they did not sign away any rights of revision of their own speech; and if a man come not honestly by his mother-tongue I know not what he may be said legitimately to own. I am not addicted to intemperate words, and harsh retaliation does not engage my assent, but when I see an Englishman reaching ‘hands across the sea’ to punish what he chooses to call an infraction of the laws of *his* language, I am tempted to slap his wrist.”

In the presence of this portentous incarna-

300 THE COLLECTED WORKS

tion of justice the Timorous Reporter trembled appropriately and was silent in all the dialects of his native land and Kansas.

"What would they have," continued the great, sad man—"these 'conservatives'? A language immune to change? That would be a dead language and we should have to evolve a successor. Ours has never been a changeless tongue; nothing is more mutable, even in its orthography. As it existed a few centuries ago it is now unintelligible except to a few specialists, yet every change has encountered as fierce hostility as any that is now proposed. Compare a page of 'Beowulf' with a page of the *London Times* or *The Spectator* and see what incalculable quantities of 'crow' the luckless 'guardians of our noble tongue' have had to swallow. Do you wonder, young man, that they are a dyspeptic folk? And did not Dr. Samuel Johnson formulate a great truth in the dictum that 'every sick man is a scoundrel'?"

"Surely," ventured the Timorous Reporter, "you would not apply so harsh a word to the great English reviewers, nor to our own beloved Professor Harry Thurston Peck!"

"To be consistent these gentlemen should not demand that the spelling remain as it is,

for its present condition is the result of innumerable defeats of themselves and their predecessors by hardy 'corruptors.' It is pusillanimous of them not only to accept a situation that has been forced upon them but to proclaim it sacred and fight for its eternal maintenance. They should be making heroic efforts to restore at least the spelling of Hakluyt and Sir John Mandeville. It is not so very long since a few timid innovators began (as secretly as the nature of the rebellious act would permit) to leave off the 'k' in such words as 'musick' 'publick' and so forth. Instantly

The wonted roar was up amid the woods,
And filled the air with barbarous dissonance—

the self-appointed 'guardians of our noble tongue' rose as one old lady and swore that rather than submit they would run away! That sacred 'k' is no more, but they are with us yet, untaught by failure and unstilled by shame. It is the nature of a fool to hate a thing when it is new, adore it when it is current, and despise it when it is obsolete."

Pleased with his epigram, the Melancholy Author so accentuated the sadness of his countenance as to invite a sincere compassion.

"We hear much from the scholar-folk about the importance of preserving the derivation of words, not only as a guide to their meaning, but because from the genealogy and biography of words we get instructive sidelights on the history and customs of nations. That is all true: philology is a useful and fascinating study. Read *The Queen's English* of the late Dean Alford if you think it is not. (Incidentally, I may mention my own humble volumes on *The Genesis and Evolution of 'Puss' as the Vocative Form of 'Cat.'*) But derivation is really not a very sure guide to signification. For example, what do I learn of the meaning of 'desultory' by knowing that it is from the Latin 'desultor,' a circus performer that leaps from horse to horse? In many instances the origin of a word is misleading, as in 'miscreant,' which, etymologically, means nothing worse than "unbeliever.' Of course it is interesting to hear in it a lingering echo of an ecclesiastic damning in a time when nothing worse than an unbeliever was thought to exist.

"But, as the late Prof. Schele de Vere pointed out, the roots of words are better disclosed in their sound than in their spelling. By phonetic spelling only can their pronun-

ciation be made nearly uniform—if that is an advantage. If this is not obvious, human intelligence is a shut clam.”

The creator of this beautiful figure celebrated it at the sideboard and resumed his illuminating discourse.

“To those who deem it worth while to be happy, the study of derivations is, indeed, a perpetual banquet of delights, but it is important to remember that language is not merely, nor chiefly, a plaything for scholars, but a thing of utility in the conduct of life and affairs. To its service in that character all obstructive considerations should, and eventually do, give way. It may please, and to some extent profit, to know that ‘phthisis’ comes from the Greek ‘phthio’—to waste away—but if in order that one may see this, as well as hear it, I must so spell it as to deny to certain letters of the alphabet their customary and established powers I protest against the desecration. Our orthography has no greater sanctity than have the vested rights of the vowels and consonants by which we achieve it. Why do not ‘the whiskered pandours and the fierce hussars’ of conservatism stand forth as champions of that noble Roman, the English alphabet?

"Yes, I concede the importance of being able to trace the origin of words, for words are thoughts, and their history is a record of intellectual progress, but in very few of them would a simplified, even a consistently phonetic, spelling tend to obscure the trail by which they came into the language. And as to these few, why not learn their origin from the dictionaries once for all and have done with it? The labor would be incomparably less than that of learning to spell as we do."

Impressed but not silenced, the thirsty soul at the fountain of wisdom cautiously advanced the view that the reformed spelling is uncouth to the eye.

"It is most dispiriting," said the oracle, in the low, sad tones that served to distinguish him from the bagpipes of Skibo castle, "to hear from the beardless lips of youth a folly so appropriate to age and experience. To the unobservant, any change in the familiar looks disagreeable. The newest fashion in silk hats looks ridiculous; a little later the old style looks worse. To me nothing is uncouth: the most refined and elevated sentiment loses nothing by its expression in as nearly phonetic spelling as our inadequate alphabet will per-

mit. For my reading you may spell like Josh Billings if you will not write like him."

"From all that you have been kind enough to say," said the Timorous Reporter, with a sudden access of courage that alarmed him, "I infer that in your forthcoming great work, *The Tyrant Preposition*, you will employ the Skibonese philanthropography."

"Not I. Courage is an excellent thing in man: the soldier is useful; but each to his trade. Mine, sir," he concluded, with a note of pride underrunning the grave, sweet monotony of his discourse, "is writing."

.

THE AUTHOR AS AN OPPORTUNITY

“**T**O the literary man,” said the Melancholy Author, “life is not all ‘beer and skittles’ by much. He is in a peculiar sense the custodian of ‘troubles of his own.’ Of these, one of the most insupportable grows out of the fact that almost every man, woman or child thinks himself, herself or itself an expert in literature, and the literary man a Heaven-sent Opportunity. No hawk ever watched a plump pullet detaching itself from the flock, with a more possessing delight than burns in the bosom of the average human being when a defenceless author ‘swims into his ken.’ Lord, Lord, with what alacrity he swoops down upon the incautious wight and holds him with his glittering eye to ‘talk books’ at him!

“He knows it all, the good assailant—knows all about books, particularly ‘the English classics’ and the newest novel. This

knowledge—consisting, at the best, in whatever is current in popular criticism of the newspaper and magazine sort—he has quite persuaded himself is knowledge of Literature. It never occurs to the good creature that books are not literature; that he might have read every book in the world yet know no more of literature than a horned toad. Naturally, you do not care to explain to him that literature is an art—the art of which books are merely a result. He sees the result, but of the art behind them he knows not even so much as its existence.

“He thinks that good writing is done as naturally, instinctively and with as little training as a bird sings in a tree, or a pig in a gate. He would be willing to admit that good painting cannot be done, good music executed, a good plea made in court, or good medical attendance given to the sick, without a deal of hard study of principles and methods. But writing—why, writing is merely setting down what you think; everybody writes.

“Even the literary critic—may hornets afflict him!—cannot be intelligently objectionable without a technical knowledge of his business. A great poet has said:

308 THE COLLECTED WORKS

A man must serve his time at every trade,
Save censure; critics all are ready made.

"And 'censure' here, you will have the goodness to observe, means not condemnation, as in our common speech, but the passing of judgment of any kind on the work of another.

"Suppose you were a famous electrician, and all other persons, eager to show you that they, too, know a thing or two and solemnly persuaded of the necessity of regaling you with scraps from your own table, should gravely define electricity as a 'mysterious force,' express to you the belief that it is destined to 'revolutionize the world' and declare their admiration of Benjamin Franklin's gigantic achievement in drawing it from a cloud. Suppose you could turn away from one tormentor only to fall into the hands of another and another, all uttering the same infantile babble—the same shallow platitudes, the same false judgment. That would be no more than we authors have to endure, and smile in the endurance. Nay, not so much, for not only do we have to suffer all this talk of the 'shop'—our shop—with all its irritating idiocy, but if we open our mouths to say something worth while, God help us!—we've

a 'fight' on hand forthwith. For it is of the nature of ignorance to be disputatious, contentious, cantankerous. The more a man does not know, the more aggressive his manner of not knowing it. Venture to rack one of his ugly literary idols by so much as the breadth of a finger and—!"

Unable to suppress his emotion, the Melancholy Author rose and strode three paces toward an open door, then turned and, striding back again, dropped into his seat and tried to look unconcerned.

"The very persons who seek your society because they honestly admire your intellect will resent every manifestation of it. Whatever they do not understand, whatever is unfamiliar to them, is bad—false and immoral and insincere. Why, I remember a woman who came four hundred miles to see me—to sit at my feet, she was kind enough to say, and partake of my wisdom. In less than ten minutes she was angrily affirming the unworth of my opinions and attempting to inoculate me with her own. What did I do? My friend, what could I do, but wait until the storm had subsided and then express my admiration of the pink bow that she wore at her throat. Alas, I had sailed into a zone of

310 THE COLLECTED WORKS

storms, for it was cherry, and away went she!

“Now, I am willing to talk of literature—it is one of the delights of my life to do so. I am even willing to ‘talk books.’ But it must be with my equals, or with those who show some sense of the fact that a lifetime passed in the study of my art, and in its practice counts for something. Few things are more agreeable than imparting knowledge to those who in good faith and decent humility seek it; and such there are. I know some of them, and in their service find enough to do to keep me awake nearly all day. But the other sort: readers of brand-new books and reviews thereof; persons who think the ancients were barbarians; philosophers by birth and critics by inspiration who know it all without having learned any part of it—may Heaven,” concluded the Melancholy Author, with a fine flourish of his right hand, “bestow them as friends upon my enemies.”

ON POSTHUMOUS RENOWN

“**N**O,” said the Melancholy Author,
“I do not expect my name to be
shouted in brass on the frieze of
Miss Helen Gould’s ‘Temple of
Fame.’”

The Timorous Reporter ventured to inquire if that was because he had the misfortune to be alive.

“That is a disqualification that time will remove,” answered the Melancholy Author. “The ground of my hope is different: I shall cause to be inscribed upon my tombstone the lines following:

Good friends, for Jesus’ sake forbear
To grieve the soul that’s gone to—where?
Blest be the man that spares my fame,
And curst be he that flaunts my name!

“The lines are admirable and extremely original,” said the Timorous Reporter. “May I ask if your reluctance to have your name emblazoned in the Temple is due to dis-

312 THE COLLECTED WORKS

esteem of the methods and results of selection, or to that innate modesty which serves to distinguish you from the violet?"

"To neither. It is due to my consciousness of the futility of all attempts to perpetuate an individual fame. When I die my fame will die with me. It is mine no longer than I live to bear it. When there is no nominative there can be no possessive.

"For illustration, you speak of Shakspeare's fame. But there is no Shakspeare. The fame that you speak of is not 'his'; it is ours—yours, mine and John Smith's. To call it 'his'—why, sir, that is as if one should concede the ownership of property to a vacuum. The dead are poor—they have nothing. Our mental confusion in this matter is no doubt largely due to our imperfect grammar: we have not enough cases in our declension; or, rather, there are not enough names for the cases that we have. In the phrase 'a horse's tail' we say rightly that 'horse's' is in the possessive case: the animal really possesses—owns—the tail. But in the phrase 'a horse's price' there is no possessive, for the horse does not own the price: there should be another name for the case. When dead, the horse does not own even the tail. It is

the same with 'Shakspeare's fame': while he lived the phrase contained a possessive case; now it is something different—merely what the Latin calls a genitive. Our name for it misleads the unenlightened and makes them think of a dead man as owning things. One of my ambitions, I may add, is to bring English grammar into conformity with fact, promoting thereby every moral, intellectual and material interest of the race!"

The Timorous Reporter summoned the courage to rouse him from ecstatic contemplation of the glory of his great reform by directing his disobedient attention to the fact that the Latin grammar, also, is defective, in that its genitive case is not supplemented by a possessive; yet the Romans appear to have had a pretty definite conception of "mine" and "thine," albeit the latter was less lucidly apprehended than the former, and held a humbler place in the national conscience. Deigning to ignore the argument, the Melancholy Author resumed his discourse:

"Posthumous fame being what it is—if nothing can be said to be something—the desire to attain it is comic. It seems the invention of a humorist, this ambition to attach to your name (and equally to that of every per-

son bearing it, or to bear it hereafter) something that you will not know that you have attached to it. You labor for a result which you are to be forever unaware that you have brought about—for a personal gratification which you know that you are eternally forbidden to enjoy: if the gods ever laugh, do they not laugh at that?”

To signify his sense of the humor of the situation, the Melancholy Author fashioned the visage of him to so poignant a degree of visible dejection as might have affected an open tomb with envy and despair.

“Some time,” he continued, “the earth, her spinning retarded by the sun’s tidal action, will turn on her axis only once a year, presenting always the same side to the sun, as Venus does now, and as the moon does to the earth. That side will be unthinkably hot; the other, dark and unthinkably cold. Of man and his works nothing will remain. Later, the sun’s light and fire exhausted, he and all his attendant planets and their satellites will whirl, as dead invisible bulks, through the black reaches of space to some inconceivable doom. Suppose that then a man who died to-day—or yesterday in Assyria—should be miraculously revived. He would

think that he had waked from a sleep of an instant's duration. What to him would seem to have been the advantage of what he once knew as 'fame'—sometimes as 'immortality'? Would he not smile to learn that his name had once evoked sentiments of admiration and respect—that it had been carved in stone or cast in metal to adorn a Temple of Fame? And when again, and finally, put to death for nothing, would not his last squeak and gurgle carry an aborted jest?

"My boy," continued the Melancholy Author, suffering a look of compassion to defile the dread solemnity of his aspect, "I perceive that I have put the matter too strongly for you. You are not at home in the fields of space; you are disconcerted by the dirge of the spheres. Let us get back to earth as we have the happiness to know it. I will read you the concluding lines of a poem by an obscure pessimist, on the brevity of time and the futility of memorial structures:

Then build your mausoleum if you must,
And creep into it with a perfect trust;

But in the twinkling of an eye the plow
Shall pass without obstruction through your dust.

316 THE COLLECTED WORKS

Another movement of the pendulum
And, lo! the desert-haunting wolf shall come
And, seated on the spot, howl all the night
O'er rotting cities, desolate and dumb."

Delighted with his ruse of binding an unresisting auditor by passing off his own poetry as that of another, the Melancholy Author fell into a sea-green stupor, and the Timorous Reporter, edging himself quietly through the door of opportunity, departed that life.

THE CRIME OF INATTENTION

“**W**HEN the germ of egotism is discovered,” said the Curmudgeon Philosopher, “it will be readily recognized. The cholera germ is sometimes called the ‘comma bacillus,’ from its resemblance to the printer’s comma; the bacillus of egotism does not look like a capital I, as you would naturally suppose, but like the note of admiration. In order to discover it you have only to shed the gore of the first man you meet (who is sure to be a bore and deserve it) and put a drop under the microscope. True, you may have defective eyesight from long contemplation of your dazzling self, and so miss it, but it is there as plain as the nose on an elephant’s face.”

The Timorous Reporter ventured to suggest that when the note of admiration was named, to admire meant, not to esteem, but to wonder—that Milton so uses it in relating the meeting of Satan and Death at the gates of Hell. There was no reason, he said, why

318 THE COLLECTED WORKS

the germ of egotism or self-esteem should have the shape of that point.

"Having discovered and isolated the germ of egotism," continued the Curmudgeon Philosopher, apparently addressing some exalted intelligence behind the Timorous Reporter, "the physicians will naturally cast about for a serum that will be powerful enough to beat it."

The Curmudgeon Philosopher had the condescension to darken his environment with a smile.

"I should suppose that this might be made from the blood of a whale, a rhinoceros, a tiger and an anaconda, all, of course, duly inoculated with the germ till silly. If a few gallons of this mighty medicament were injected into the veins of a patient not more than two years of age it might so check his self-esteem that on growing up he would emblazon the violet on his coat of arms."

The Curmudgeon Philosopher manifested his sense of his own distinction as a wit by a gesture singularly and appropriately elephantine. He had the goodness to continue: "A few years ago, before a just appreciation of the dignity of my position as a philosopher had compelled my withdrawal from the clubs and taverns, I used to observe that of a half-

dozen men sitting about a table and engaged in the characteristic industry of smoking and drinking, four were commonly talking of themselves, one, with an impediment in his enterprise, was endeavoring to 'get the floor' in order to talk about *himself*, and the other (I trust it is needless to name him) was vainly asking attention to matters of interest and importance.

"It was customary among these gentlemen to interrupt one another in the middle of a sentence by ordering drinks or entering into a colloquy with the waiter, or addressing a trivial question to another of the party. Habitually the person speaking had the mortification to see his interlocutor turn squarely away from him and himself begin a monologue, only to be disregarded in his turn. There is something singularly pathetic in the spectacle of a man with an unfinished discourse turning to the only one of the party that has the civility to hear him out. It is one of the minor tragedies of social life, demanding an infinite compassion. Sometimes the sufferer would signify a just resentment by abruptly rising and leaving the table, but the rebuke was never even observed.

"Not the monologist alone was ignored in this unmannerly way; the nimble epigram-

320 THE COLLECTED WORKS

matist fared no better. The brightest sallies of wit, the oddest ventures in paradox, the most delicious bits of humor and the finest turns of wisdom—all met the same fate, all alike fell upon the stony soil of inattention. Remember that I speak, not of ordinary dullards, but of the so-called choice spirits of clubland, ‘gentlemen of wit and pleasure about town.’”

With a sidewise movement toward the door the Timorous Reporter cautiously advanced the notion that possibly something in the quality of the Curmudgeon Philosopher’s wit may not have had the good fortune to commend itself to his auditors.

“Selected from Apuleius, from Rabelais, Pascal, Rochefoucauld, Pope, and boldly worked into the conversation, they always passed without recognition of either their source or their wit. The company was simply unaware that anything out of the common had been said. Egotism has a bale of cotton in each ear.”

The Curmudgeon Philosopher paused to note the effect of his epigram. Seeing that safety meant either applause or absence the Timorous Reporter deemed it expedient to withdraw by way of an open window.

FETISHISM

“**W**E are wiser in many ways than our savage ancestors; we are wiser than the savages of to-day,” said the Curmudgeon Philosopher, with the air of one making a great concession; “yet for every folly or vice of uncivilized man I can show you a corresponding one among ourselves. In the matter of religions, for example, and of religious rites and observances, we have, mixed in with our better faiths, vestiges of all the primitive superstitions that have marked the childhood of the race. Vestiges, did I say? Why, sir, in many instances we have the veritable thing itself in all the vigor of its perennial prime.”

The Reporter ventured to express a conviction that a crude and primitive religion could have no devotees among so enlightened and cultivated a people as ours.

“Sir,” thundered the Adversary of Presumption, turning a delicate purple, “races

322 THE COLLECTED WORKS

are like individuals; along with the vices and virtues of maturity they have those of infancy. No people ever is sufficiently civilized and enlightened to have laid aside any of its early superstitions and absurdities. To these it adds better things. It overwrites its primitive ideas with ideas less crude and reasonless; but nothing has been effaced. [The latest text of the palimpsest is most in evidence, but all is there and, to a keen enough observation, legible. Did you never see a whole concourse of moderns uncover to a flag?"]

The Reporter confessed that those whom he had seen performing this religious rite were mostly moderns.

"They will say when detected," continued the oracle, "that what they uncover to is not the flag, but the sentiment that it represents. If ingenious enough, the idolater would make the same defence. So would the shagpated chap that prostrates himself before the sacred moogoo tree.

"What's that—a flag is a symbol? Why, yes, 'symbol' is the name we choose to give to objects which we know to have no real sanctity, yet, either from hereditary instinct or other unreasoning impulse, cannot forbear

to revere. The word is also used to denote a mere 'survival,' an object that once had a useful purpose, but now exists only because of our habit of having it. Be pleased to look down into that burial place."

The Curmudgeon Philosopher's dwelling had characteristically been chosen because of its contiguity to a cemetery.

"Note the number of 'dummy' urns surmounting the monuments. Centuries ago, when cremation was the rule, as it seems likely to be again, those would have been true urns, holding ashes of the dead. We have inherited the tendency to have them, but as they have now no utility we spare ourselves the trouble of accounting for them by saying they are symbolic—whereby the fashion is exalted to a high dignity.

"I assume your familiarity with the word 'fetish.' It is spelled two ways and pronounced four; I pronounce it as I was taught at my mother's knee."

By way of accentuating the fact that he had had a mother he affected a rudimentary tenderness of tone and expression which in a case of doubtful identity would have assisted in distinguishing him as a pirate of the Spanish Main.

324 THE COLLECTED WORKS

The Reporter asked what fetish worship might have the hardihood to be.

"Fetish worship," replied the Curmudgeon Philosopher, "is the most primitive of religions. It is the form that belief in the supernatural takes in our lowest stage of intellectual development—the adoration of material objects. A stone or a tree supposed to possess supernatural powers of good or evil, or to have some peculiar sanctity, is a fetish. Idolatry and the worship of living things are not uncommonly confounded with fetish worship, but in reality are another and higher form of religion, belonging to a more advanced culture.

"You have seen the proposal to transport Plymouth Rock about the country for a show? It is in the morning papers, one of which I had the back luck to pick up while at breakfast. Hate the morning papers!"

The Timorous Reporter signified his regret.

"I hope it will not be done," continued the Curmudgeon Philosopher, ignoring the apology. "In the first place, the Rock is devoid of authenticity. It is indubitably a rock, and it is at Plymouth, but its connection with the landing of the Pilgrims was sup-

plied by imagination. That is all right; by imagination we demonstrate our superiority to the novelists. Historians and scientists are credentialed by imagination; through imagination the philosopher attains to a knowledge of the meaning and message of things. Without imagination we should be as the magazine poets that perish."

With obvious satisfaction in his character of cynic the Curmudgeon Philosopher again mitigated the austerity of his countenance—this time by something that may have been honestly intended as a smile.

"We have seen bands of children taught to march about a cracked bell, throw flowers upon it, sing hymns to it. When it stopped in the several cities that it was carried through on a triumphal car the populace turned out to worship it. It was supplied with a 'guard of honor.' Bands played appropriate music before it, and mayors 'delivered eulogies.' No popular hero or august sovereign could be accorded a more obsequious homage than this lifeless piece of cracked metal—nay, its progress is more like that of a Grecian god. This was fetishism, pure and undefiled.

"If this new project is carried out the peo-

ple that worshiped a bell will worship a stone. True, the stone weighs several tons."

Proud of his generosity in making so great a concession, the Curmudgeon Philosopher looked over the top of his spectacles for the applause that came not to his hope.

"Sir," he concluded, his great fist falling like a thunderbolt upon the table at which he stood, "we are Pottawattomies!"

OUR AUDIBLE SISTERS

“**N**O,” said the Curmudgeon Philosopher, “I am no believer in ‘the elevating influence of woman.’ We have had women a long time, now; the influence is obvious, but the elevation—we are still waiting for that. Perhaps it was different in the old days when they had no connection with public affairs and could devote their entire attention to the business of giving men ‘a leg up,’ but to-day they are so busy assisting us to conduct the world’s large activities that they overlook our dissatisfaction with the low moral plane that we occupy.

“I think, sir, that old Sir William Devereux was wrong when he said that the best way to keep the dear creatures from playing the devil was to encourage them in playing the fool. We have been for more than a generation encouraging them to play the fool in a thousand and fifty ways, and they play the devil as never before.

328 THE COLLECTED WORKS

"These dreadful creatures—I mean these dear, delightful darlings—care for nothing but abstract ideas having no practical application to actual conditions in a faulty world. In the councils of Them Loud nobody cares for anything but principles and Principle. Every Mere Male who anywhere ventures to lift up his voice in behalf of an imperfect but practicable reform is outfitted by them with a set of motives that would disgrace a pirate. To the she colonels of uplift, nothing is so fascinating as Abstract Reform; they roll it as a sweet morsel under and over their tireless tongues. At every session of Congress you shall hear again the clank of the female saber in the corridors and committee rooms of the Capitol, intimidating the poltroon law maker. You shall hear the war whoop of the Sexless Impracticables, acclaiming the Sufficient Abstraction and denouncing the coarse expedients of the Erring Male. May the devil shepherd them in a barren place!"

Overcome by his emotions, the Curmudgeon Philosopher cruelly kicked the house dog (which "answered not with a caress"), and snorted at vacancy.

"What good does it all do, anyhow—this irruption of women into the domain of pub-

lic affairs? The advantages that Lively Woman promised even herself in becoming New and Audible are illusory; those that she renounced were real. For one thing, we no longer love her. Why, sir, I remember the time when I myself would have taken trouble to serve and honor women. I may say that I felt for them a special esteem. How is it to-day? They pass me by as the idle wind, unobserved, and—most significant of all—unobserving.

“Love, sir, ‘romantic love,’ as Tolstoi calls it, is a purely artificial thing. Many nations know it not. The ancient Greeks knew it not; the Japanese of yesterday did not at all comprehend it. There have been no other really civilized nations. We love those who are helpless and dependent on us. That is why we love our children and our pets.

“In demanding equal rights before the law woman renounces her claim to exceptional tenderness; in granting the demand, man accepts the renunciation in good faith. If the rest of you are going to look out for my wife, sir, I am left free to look out for myself. Have I really a wife? God forbid—I’m supposing one.

“When in the history of our civilization

330 THE COLLECTED WORKS

was romantic love at high noon? Why, sir, 'when knighthood was in flower'; when woman was a chattel; when a gentleman could divorce himself with a word. It was then that woman was set upon a pedestal and adored. Men consecrated their lives to the service of the sex—fought for woman, sang of her with a sincerity that is sadly lacking in the imitation troubadours of our time. Why, sir, even I, in my youth, composed some verses."

The Curmudgeon Philosopher educed a manuscript from his breast-pocket and the Timorous Reporter began to withdraw from the Presence.

"O, very well—I'll not force them on you; but permit me to remark, sir, that the decay of courtesy toward women is not unattended with a certain growing coarseness of manners in general. Those who have caught the base infection are not gentlemen, and you may go to the devil!"

THE NEW PENOLOGY

“**T**RUE science,” said the Curmudgeon Philosopher, “began with publication, in 1620, of Lord St. Albans’ *Novum Organum*. Why not Lord Bacon’s? Because, my benighted friend, there was no ‘Lord Bacon.’ He was Francis Bacon, Baron Verulam, and, later, Viscount St. Albans. When you hear a man speak of ‘Lord Bacon’ fly from that man.

“The *Novum Organum*, or new method, has overthrown the *Organum* of Aristotle and released men’s minds from thralldom to the belief that truth could be got by mere reasoning, unaided by observation and experiment. This faith in the all-sufficiency of Logic had persisted for more than two thousand years, an intellectual paralysis invulnerable to treatment; and all the while the world thought itself enjoying robust mental health.

“Belief in the sufficiency of Deduction was not the only delusion that dominated and shackled the human mind, and some of the

others are with us to-day, to comfort and inspire! We think that if we did not have them we should be sick."

Pleased with his wit, the Curmudgeon Philosopher executed the great convulsion of nature which he knew as a smile.

"One of the most mischievous of these false and futile faiths is known as the Reformation of Criminals. With no result, we have been embracing it with a devout fervor since the dawning of time. Our mistake is not so much that we have neglected to get the consent of the criminals as that we think ourselves able to reform them without it.

"Each habitual criminal is the hither end of an interminable line of criminal ancestors. He can reform no more than he can fly: his character is as immutable as the shape of his head or the texture of the muscle that he calls his heart. Our efforts in his behalf recall the story of the physician who, after examining a patient afflicted with a disorder of the skin, said: 'This is hereditary; we must begin at the beginning. Go home and tell your father to take a sulphur bath.' Our criminals are in worse case than that patient; he had an accessible father for the treatment.

"What have I to propose? What is the

‘New Method’ that I favor? What would I substitute for ‘reformation’ of the unworthy? Their ‘destruction—I would kill them.’”

With obvious pride in this humane suggestion, he stroked his ragged beard with both hands and adored his reflection in the mirror opposite his pedestal.

“It sounds harsh, I dare say, to one unfamiliar with the thought, and I might have said ‘remove’ if that would seem less alarming; but ‘kill’ is an honest word, and I’ll stand to it.

“Think of it! The New Method would give us in two generations a nation without habitual criminals! What other will do that? Think of the lessened misery, the security of life and property, the lighter burden of taxation to maintain the machinery of justice, the no police—all that the besotted proponents of ‘Reformation’ hope and hope again and hope in vain to accomplish brought about in the lifetime of one man!

“And by means that are merciful to the criminals themselves. Can there be a doubt that if in him the love of life were not the mere brute instinct of a perverted soul the habitual criminal would prefer death? What

334 THE COLLECTED WORKS

does life hold that is worth anything to such as he, devoid of self-respect and the respect of others, victim alike of justice and injustice, denied the delights that come of refined sensibilities, hunted from pillar to post and ever cowering in fear of the law? Nothing is more cruel than to let him live. And at last he dies anyhow.

“But suppose that the painless putting to death of all criminals were as deep a misfortune as it would be to—to philosophers, for example? Yet in the long run it would vastly lessen the total of human unhappiness, even of public executions. The earth was not made yesterday: for thousands, probably hundreds of thousands of years, men have been putting other men to death for crime.

“Even under the mild laws of to-day in civilized countries the number executed will in the course of the ages enormously exceed to-day’s total criminal population. Moreover, it would not be necessary to kill them all: most of them, if confronted by a law for their killing, would take themselves out of the country, quarter themselves upon foolish nations still willing to stand their nonsense—nations still enamored of that ancient delusion, Reformation of Criminals.

"That would serve *your* purpose as well as anything, but as a citizen of the world, owing my first allegiance to Mankind," concluded the Curmudgeon Philosopher, with a gesture appropriate to some noble ancestral sentiment, "I should deem it my duty to endeavor to prevent their escape by writs of *ne exeat regno*."

THE NATURE OF WAR

THE Bald Campaigner was looking over the tops of his spectacle lenses, silent, obviously wise, a thing of beauty.

"Do you approve the punishment of General Jacob Smith, who was dismissed from the army for barbarism?" asked the Timorous Reporter. "Doubtless you remember the incident."

"My approval," said the great soldier, "is needless and of no significance. I have long been on the retired list myself, and am not the reviewing officer in this case. I think General Smith's punishment just, if that's what you want to know. He committed a serious indiscretion. As a commander of troops in the island of Samar he gave to a subordinate the following oral instructions:

"I want no prisoners. I wish you to kill and burn; the more you kill and burn the better you will please me." He said, further, that he wanted all persons killed who

were capable of bearing arms and were in actual hostilities against the United States—I am quoting the Secretary of War—and, in reply to a question by his subordinate, asking for an age limit, designated it as ten years.

“All this was highly improper and unmilitary. It is customary in matters of so great importance for the commander to give his instructions in the form of written orders—a good commander is without a tongue.

“I am no great literary genius, but in the matter of military orders I know a hawk from a handsaw by the handsaw’s teeth. Suppose General Smith’s orders (written orders) had read like this:

“‘It is thought that it will be to the advantage of the expedition in point of celerity of movement, and will simplify the problem of supply, if the column be not encumbered with prisoners. The commander of the expedition will not be unmindful of the military advantages that flow from the infliction of as many casualties upon the enemy as is practicable with the small force that he commands and the evasive character of the enemy; nor will he overlook the need of removing by fire such structures and supplies as are incompatible with the interests of the

338 THE COLLECTED WORKS

United States, or inconsistent with professions of amity on the part of the island's inhabitants, or conducive to the prosperity of those in rebellion. No person engaged in hostilities against the United States will, of course, be suffered to plead sex or age in mitigation of such mischances as the fortunes of war may entail, provided, however, that no non-combatants of either sex under the age of ten years shall under any circumstances be put to death without authority from these headquarters; the traditional benevolence of the American army must not be impaired.'

"Sir, if General Smith had issued an order like that he would to-day be a popular hero and an ornament to the active list of the army."

Waving his remaining arm with a gesture singularly cogent and convincing, the Bald Campaigner ceased and marched against a hostile bottle near by. After study of the suppositious "order" in his stenographic notes, the reporter ventured the opinion that the difference between it and the oral instructions actually given was mainly one of expression. The Bald Campaigner said in reply:

"Expression is everything. An army officer should be a master of expression, as a baseball pitcher should be a master of delivery. The straight throw and the curved throw carry the ball to the same spot, but consider the different effect upon the fortunes of the pitcher. What General Smith lacked was not heart, but style. He was not cruel, but clumsy. His words were destitute of charm. His blundering tongue had succeeded only in signifying his fitness to be thrown to the civilian lions."

The reporter hazarded a belief that the General's instruction to make Samar "a howling wilderness" was brutal exceedingly.

"Certainly it was," assented the Bald Campaigner, "an officer of refinement and taste would have said: 'It will be found expedient to operate against the enemy's material resources.' There is never a military necessity for coarse speech.

"As to devastation—did you mention devastation?—that is the purpose of war. War is made, not against the bodies of adult males, but against the means of subsistence of a people. The fighting is incident to the devastation: we kill the soldiers because they protect their material resources—get between us

340 THE COLLECTED WORKS

and the fields that feed them, the factories that clothe them, the arsenals that arm them. We cannot hope to kill a great proportion of them at best; the humane thing is to overcome them by means of hunger and nakedness. The earlier we can do so, the less effusion of blood. Leave the enemy his resources and he will fight forever. He will beget soldiers faster than you can destroy them.

“Do you cherish the delusion that in our great civil war, for example, the South was subdued by killing her able-bodied males who could bear arms? Look at the statistics and learn, to your astonishment, how small a proportion of them we really did kill, even before I lost my arm.

“The killing was an incident. I speak of the latter part of the conflict, when we had learned how to conduct military operations. As long as our main purpose was bloodshed we made little progress. Our armies actually guarded the homes and property of the men they were sent to conquer—the very men that were fighting them, and who, therefore, assured of the comfort and safety of their families, continued fighting with cheerful alacrity. If we had continued that rose-

water policy they might have fought us to this day."

The reporter involuntarily glanced at a calendar on the wall, and the war oracle continued:

"Wisdom came of experience: we adopted the more effective and more humane policy of devastation. With Sherman desolating the country from Atlanta to Goldsborough and Sheridan so wasting the Shenandoah Valley that he boasted the impossibility of a crow passing over it without carrying rations, the hopes of Confederate success went up in smoke.

"And," concluded the hairless veteran, rising and opening the door as a delicate intimation that there was nothing more to say, "I beg leave to think that the essential character of the *Ultima Ratio* is not permanently obscurable by the sentimental vagaries of blithering civilians such as you have the lack of distinction to be."

The Timorous Reporter retired to his base of operations and the war-drum throbbed no longer in his ear.

HOW TO GROW GREAT

“**I** DO not overlook the disadvantages of defeat in a war with some foreign power,” said the Bald Campaigner; “I only say that in the resulting humiliation would be a balance of advantage. It does a nation good to ‘eat the leek.’ The great Napoleon thrust that tonic vegetable into the mouths of Prussia and the other German states. They took a bellyful each, and the result of that penitential feast is the splendid German empire of to-day. Before their racial health was entirely restored the Germans passed the unwelcome comestible to the ailing dominion of Napoleon the Stuffed, and France has so thriven on the diet that she no longer fears the hand that wrote the *menu*. Alone among modern states, Great Britain has grown powerful without having had to cry for mercy. In the voice of supplication is heard the prophecy of power.”

The Timorous Reporter cautiously named our own country as one that has risen to great-

ness without suffering defeat and humiliation.

"Sir, you are in error," said the Bald Campaigner loftily. "We were defeated in the War of 1812. Wherever our raw volunteers met the trained veterans of Great Britain (except at New Orleans, when the war was over) we were beaten off the field. Our attempts to invade Canada were all repelled, our capital was taken and sacked, and when we sued for peace it was granted in a treaty in which the grievance for which we had taken up arms was contemptuously ignored.

"Remember that for this conflict we enlisted and equipped more than a half-million men, while Great Britain had at no time more than sixteen thousand opposing us.

"As historians of the conflict we have done heroic work, as have Southern historians of our civil war and French historians of the struggle with the Germans—as all beaten peoples naturally do. Sir, do you know that the great body of the Spanish people believe, and will always believe, that Spain brought us to our knees in 1898? The Russian who does not think that the armies of the Czar wrung the most humiliating terms from the Japanese is an exceptionally intelligent Russian—he knows enough to disbelieve the

344 THE COLLECTED WORKS

‘popular histories’ in the Russian tongue and the official falsehoods of his government.”

The Timorous Reporter inquired how a second beating would profit us, seeing that we got no good out of the other.

“The other was not bad enough,” the great man explained. “Having Napoleon on her hands, Great Britain did not, until he had been got rid of, make an aggressive war. When she began to we cried for mercy. What we need is a beating that neither our vanity can deny nor our ingenuity excuse—one which, in the slang of your pestilent trade, ‘will not come off.’”

“And then?”

“Then, sir, we shall give ourselves an army strong enough to repel invasion from the north, or, if something should happen to our navy, from the east or west. Then, sir, we shall get our soldiers by conscription, and the man who is drawn will serve. The words ‘volunteer,’ ‘recruiting,’ ‘bounty,’ ‘substitute’ will disappear from our military vocabulary, with all the inefficiency, waste, and shame that they connote. In brief, we shall recognize the truth, obvious to reason, that a citizen owes his country military service in the same way that he owes it pecuni-

ary support. (If taxpaying had always been optional what an expostulation would meet the proposal to make it compulsory!) We shall then not need to concern ourselves with 'the problem of desertion,' 'the effect on the army of high wage-rates in civil employment,' and the rest of it. There will be no problem of desertion: the discernment that recognizes a citizen's military obligation will find an effective method preventing him from running away from it. All this will come after we have been sorely defeated by some power, or combination of powers, that has not only a navy but an army."

The Timorous Reporter hesitatingly advanced the view that a large standing army might seriously imperil the subordination of the military to the civil power.

"Young man," said the hairless veteran, austerely, "you talk like a Founder of this Republic!"

A WAR IN THE ORIENT

“**C**ONSIDERING your pro-Russian sympathies,” said the Timorous Reporter, “the results of some of the fighting in the Japanese and Russian war must have been deeply disagreeable to you—that of the great naval engagement in the Sea of Japan, for example.”

“Yes,” replied the Bald Campaigner, “the escape of two or three Russian ships affected me most unpleasantly.”

The reporter professed himself unable to understand.

“I had confidently expected Togo to destroy them all. He is disappointing—Togo.”

“Please pardon me,” said the man of letters; “I thought that you had favored the Russian cause.”

“So I did, sir, so I did, and do. But something is due to the art and science of war. As a soldier I stand for them, deprecating

any laxity in the application of the eternal principles of strategy and tactics by land or sea. Admiral Togo should have been dismissed for permitting those ships to escape."

The reporter suggested the possibility that in the uproar and obscurity of battle the ships that got away were overlooked.

"Nothing should be overlooked," said the Bald Campaigner. "The commander in battle should know everything that is going on—or going away. With the light that we have, I am unable to explain the Japanese admiral's lamentable failure; I can only deplore it."

"Had he, then, so overwhelming an advantage?" the reporter asked. "It is thought the fleets were pretty evenly matched."

"Sir," said the Bald Campaigner, loftily, "it was a fight between an inland people and an insular. If Rojestvensky had had a hundred battleships he would have been overmatched and defeated. Ships and guns do not make a navy, and landsmen are not transmuted into sailors by sending them to sea. The Russians are not a sea-going people. Their country has no open ports—that is what they are always fighting to get. They have

no foreign commerce; they have no fisheries. Why, sir, it reminds me of the reply made by a Scotch carter to an angry soldier who had challenged him to fight. 'Fecht wi' ye? Na, na, fechtin's yer trade. But I'll drive a cart wi' ye.' If command of the ocean were a matter of planting potatoes, Russia would be a great sea power.

"The born sailor is a being of an order different from ourselves—as different as a gull from a grouse, a seal from a cat. What, to a landsman, is a matter of study, memory and calculation, is to him a matter of intuition. An unstable plane is his natural, normal and helpful footing. As a gun-pointer he sights his piece not only consciously with his instruments and his eye, but unconsciously with that better instrument, the sense of direction—as one plays billiards. The rolling and pitching of the ships do not spoil his aim; he allows for them automatically—*feels* the auspicious instant with the sure instinct of an expert rifleman breaking bottles in the air. It is impossible to impart this subtle sense to a farmer's boy, or to a salesman in a shop, no matter how young you catch him; he cannot be made to understand it—cannot even be made to un-

derstand that it can be. For that matter, nobody does understand it.

"I am not unaware, sir, of the 'modern' methods of sea-fighting—keeping at a safe distance from the enemy and pointing the guns by means of range-finders and other instruments and machines, but nothing that can be invented can eliminate the 'personal equation' in sea-fighting, any more than in land-fighting parapets, casemates, turrets and other defensive works can profitably replace the breasts of the soldiers, or arms of precision take the place of their natural aptitude for battle with both feet on the ground. I am not unmindful of the time when the Romans improvised a fleet (constructed on the model of a wrecked Carthaginian galley) and manning it with landsmen destroyed the sea-power of Carthage in a single engagement. That exception tests the rule (*probat regulam*) but the rule stands. Landsmen for soldiers, sailors for the sea and to the devil with military machinery!

"Before our civil war we had a merchant marine second only to that of Great Britain. American sails whitened every sea, the stars and stripes glowed in every port. We were a nation of sailors. Even so long ago as the

350 THE COLLECTED WORKS

war of 1812 we held our own with Great Britain on the ocean, though beaten everywhere on land by inferior numbers with superior training. To-day we could not hold our own against any maritime people, even if we fought with full coal-bunkers near our own shores. The American behind the gun is no longer a born sailor with the salt of the sea in every globule of the blood of him. Our fate in encountering a seagoing people, sailors and fishermen and the sons of sailors and fishermen, with sea legs, sea eyes and sea souls, would be that which has befallen inlanders against islanders, from Salamis to Tsu Shima. The sea would be strewn with a wreckage of American 'magnificent fighting-machines.'"

The Timorous Reporter murmured the words "Manila Bay" and "Santiago de Cuba," then diffidently lifted his eyes, with a question mark in each, to the face of his distinguished interlocutor—which darkened with a smile.

"With regard to Manila," he said, "I am told that Dewey's famous command, 'You may fire when you are ready, Gridley,' was not accurately reported. According to my informant, the Spanish ships were ingeniously

wound with ropes to keep them from falling apart. What Dewey actually said was this: 'When you are ready, Gridley, you may fire at those ropes.' Anybody can cut a rope with a cannon if not molested. At Santiago, the Spanish Admiral was ordered not to give battle, but to escape, and ships cannot run away and fight at the same time.

"Sir, two naval victories in which the victors lost one man killed do not supply a reasonable presumption of invincibility. Manila and Santiago were slaughters, not battles. They are without value."

The reporter said he thought that they were not altogether worthless as "horrors of war," and visibly shuddered. The superior intelligence flamed and thundered!

"That is all nonsense about 'the horrors of war,' in so far as the detestable phrase implies that they are worse than those of peace; they are more striking and impressive, that is all. As to the loss of life, I submit that civilians mostly die some time, and are mourned, too, quite as feelingly as soldiers; and the kind of death that is inflicted by war-weapons is distinctly less objectionable than that resulting from disease. Wars are expensive, doubtless, but somebody gets the

money; it is not thrown into the sea. In point of fact, modern nations are never so prosperous as in the years immediately succeeding a great war. I favor anything that will quicken our minds, elevate our sentiments and stop our secreting selfishness, as, according to that eminent naturalist, the late William Shakspeare, toads get venom by sleeping under cold stones. A quarter-century of peace will make a nation of block-heads and scoundrels. Patriotism is a vice, but it is a larger vice, and a nobler, than the million petty ones which it promotes in peace to swallow up in war. In the thunder of guns it becomes respectable. I favor war, famine, pestilence—anything that will stop the people from cheating and confine that practice to contractors and statesmen.

“To return to Russia—”

“Which,” said the reporter, *sotto voce*, “many Russians abroad do not care to do.”

“You said, I think, that she does not seem to be much of a power on either sea or land. She was a power in the time of the first Napoleon. She held out a long time at Sevastopol against the English, the French, the Turks and the Sardinians. She defeated the Turks at Shipka Pass and Plevna, and the

Turks are the best soldiers in Europe. True, in the war with Japan, she lost every battle. That was to be expected, for she was all unready and her armies were outnumbered two to one from the beginning. No one outside Russia, and few inside, has ever come within a quarter million of a correct estimate of the Japanese strength. There were not fewer than seven hundred thousand of these cantankerous little devils in front of Gunshu Pass."

"Then they are—in a military sense—'cantankerous,'" said the reporter. "That is about the same as saying that they are good soldiers, is it not?"

"Oh, they fight well enough. Why shouldn't they? They have something to fight for; the pride of an honorable history; a government that does not rob them; a civilization that is to them new and fascinating, reared, as the superstructure of a glittering temple, upon an elder one, whose stones were hewn and laid and wrought into beauty by their forefathers, while ours were chasing one another through marshes with flint spears. Best of all, they had a sovereign whom they adore as a deity and love with a passionate personal attachment. What can you do

against such a people as that?—a people in whom patriotism is a religion—a nation of poets, artists and philosophers, like the ancient Greeks; of statesmen and warriors, like those of early Rome?”

“If the Japanese are all that you think them,” said the reporter, “how do you justify your pro-Russian sympathies?”

“It is not the business of a student of military affairs to have sympathies,” replied the Bald Campaigner, coldly; “but it is precisely because they are that kind of people that their overthrow is, to America, a military necessity. They are dangerous neighbors to so feeble barbarians as we, with a government which all extol and none respects—a loose unity and no illusions—a slack allegiance and no consciousness of national life—a bickering aggregation of individuals, man against man and class against class—a motley crowd of lawless, turbulent and avaricious ungovernables!”

He paused from exhaustion and mopped his shining pow with his handkerchief.

“Maybe Americans are like that,” assented the reporter, “but it is said that we fight pretty well on occasion—in a civil war, for example.”

"Certainly, all Caucasians fight 'pretty well' compared with other Caucasians. The Japs are another breed."

The Inquiring Mind was convinced, but not silenced. "Suppose," said he, "that a collision ever occurs between an American and a Japanese fleet or army on equal terms, what, in your honest judgment as a military expert, will be the result?"

"Damn them!" shouted the man of no sympathies, "we'll wipe them off the face of the earth!"

A JUST DECISION

“ **A** H, I have long hoped for this,” said the Sentimental Bachelor. “It is a good while now—I think it must be ever since Adam—that Tyrant Man has had to pay all too dearly for the favor—and favors—of the unfair sex. Of course, there is a difference in the value of the advantages enjoyed. For illustration, there is the good will of Celeste, of Babette, of Clarisse—best of all, of the incomparable Clorinda! I say good will, for I speak of that which I myself have had the supreme distinction to enjoy; and no gentleman, sir, will ever so far forget himself as to call a lady’s preference for him by a stronger name. Discretion, sir, discretion—that is what every man of sense and feeling goes in for.”

The Timorous Reporter signified such approval as was consistent with the public interest and the prosperity of the press.

“As I was saying, the good will of the ad-

mirable Nanette, the most excellent Lucia—excellent no longer, alas, for she is dead—of the superb Héloïse, and I might, perhaps, add to the list one or two others, is above price and beyond appraisement. Yet it was not to be had for nothing; the gods are not so kind. I have suffered, sir, I have paid, believe me.

“What am I coming to? Why, this, my lad, this. The supreme court of one of our States has decided that, in proving an intention of marriage on the part of a male defendant, what the lady plaintiff may have said to others about it is not competent evidence. ‘Hearsay evidence’? Why, yes; the honorable court was polite enough to call it so, but, doubtless, if, with all due respect for the ladies mentioned—Herminia, Adèle, Demetria and the others—I may venture to say so, the real ground of exclusion of such evidence is its incredibility. I trust to your discretion not to report me as uttering that opinion; not for the world would I wound the sensibilities of the adorable Miranda, most veracious of her sex.”

The speaker paused, gazing pensively at vacancy as if communing with the day before yesterday. The reporter endeavored to

reveal by his manner a policy of expectation.

"My dear boy," resumed the Sentimental Bachelor, "if you aspire to the good will of a woman, and are marriageable, you should be prepared and willing to have it believed by all her friends that your intentions are honorable—yes, sir; you must submit to be placed in that false position: it is a part of the price. True, you may swear the lady to secrecy; and Congreve says that no one is so good as a woman to keep a secret, for, although she is sure to tell it, yet nobody will believe her. Alas! he underestimated human credulity, which is the eighth wonder of the world. Beware of human credulity; it is always ready to believe the worst.

"What's that? You have had sweethearts that did not say you wanted to marry them; women friends that did not say you were in love with them? Fortunate man! But consider how young you are. It is a just inference that they too are young. Youth is the season of veracity; wait. As these excellent young ladies (whom Heaven bless) grow older—as they miss more and more the attentions of men—as they dwell more and more upon joys of the irrevocable past, they will have a different story to tell, and right mercifully is it decreed that they shall be-

lieve it themselves. Why, even the once charming Doretta finds, I am told, a consolation for the horrors of age and whist in the dream of repeated proposals from me—Meeee! Ah, well, it were inhuman to deny to one to whom I gave so much the happiness of stating the amount of the benefaction. Far be it from me to bring down her gray hairs in sorrow to the truth.

“But, suppose, my dear young friend, that I were wealthy enough to be sued for breach of promise of marriage—which Heaven forbid! You see how this righteous decision of that supreme court would remove from me the temptation and necessity of contradicting a lady. Oh, it is a great decision! It marks a notable advance in the apprehension of the underlying motives of human action. For they are human—except Iphigenia, who is divine. Not so beautiful as Perdita; not so intelligent as Lorena; not so devoted as Janette; so young as Marie; so faithful as Theodora—peerless Theodora! But Iphigenia—she has the cleverness to be so very new! It makes a difference.”

Remarking that Bulwer was a most admirable writer, the Timorous Reporter took his leave.

THE LION'S DEN

“**I** CAN NOT accept the view,” said the Sentimental Bachelor, looking up from his piano stool, “that because one has a houseful of books and pictures one is necessarily a lover of literature and art. I have a few myself—not many; but you will observe that my book-cases have not glass doors; on the contrary (if you understand the significance of that phrase), they are beautiful examples of the cabinetmaker’s craft, harmonizing well with the architectural and color schemes of the rooms containing them. But the devil a book can you see in them without opening them.

“Why is that? Because, in the first place, books are not beautiful—at least none of those within the means of any but a millionaire. Even the most costly and sumptuous of them are angular, blocklike objects, displeasing to the eye. Unless bound with special reference to the room in which they are to turn their backs on you, most of them will be out of

harmony with their environment and with one another.

"Yes, you see here scattered about, mostly on the floor, a few books" (the Sentimental Bachelor indicated them by a graceful gesture of his right hand) "that are as unlovely as any. But these are volumes having for me a peculiar value from pleasant or tender association—just as any article might have—just, in fact, as that rug has, upon which the divine Janette has deigned to set her little feet. Ah, Janette the adorable!—Melissa being dead.

"You dare to think, no doubt, that with glass doors to my book-cases I should be better able to find readily any particular volume that I might want. Pardon me, but it is unworthy of you to impute to me so deep and dark an ignorance. I should be sorry if ever I failed to put my hand on any desired book in the darkest night. Believe me, my friend, it is not the book-lover who displays his books in a show-case.

"As to pictures, if I were so unfortunate as to own all the treasures of the Dresden galleries, you would see no more than one painting in a room. That is the Japanese way, and the Japanese are the only civilized people in

362 THE COLLECTED WORKS

our modern world; they are born artists all, though some neglect their mental heritage and go out as cooks. Think of it!—a people among whom the arranging of three cut flowers in a vase (they know not the dreadful ‘bouquet’) is an art having its principles and laws, its learned professors to expound them, its honorable place in the curriculum of public and private education!

“Trust the Japanese to be always right in a matter of art. His instinct is as infallible as that of the ancient Greek; and our European ‘schools’ of painting are already greatly indebted to him. It is a silly new picture in which the Japanese influence can not be traced. I’m ordering my dependent young brother from Paris to Tokio to study art—the little rascal!

“One painting in a room fixes attention; two divide it; more than two disperse it. Than a wall plastered with bad canvases I know of nothing more distracting and confusing except a wall plastered with good ones. It is like a swarm of pretty girls, or a table d’hôte dinner in a country hotel, where all you are to eat is brought in at once and arranged round your plate. It kills the appetite.

"Why does one do that sort of thing? To impress one's visitors—to show off. No, no; it is not because one is fond of paintings and never tires of them. Be pleased to exercise your faculty of observation. I passed a few weeks recently at the country house of a friend. Before I had been half an hour in the place he had taken me through all the rooms and shown me a hundred of his 'art treasures'—paintings by famous 'masters.' (Maybe I had my own opinion as to that.) For my pleasure? Why, no; he allowed me less than a half minute to each. Gadzooks! can a fellow digest a painting that he has *bolted*? No, sir; 'twas for gratification of his vanity of possession. During the weeks that I remained in his house I never once caught him, nor any member of his family, standing before any one of all those pictures, silently 'taking it in.' The purpose of the pictures was to supply an opportunity for his visitors' envy and compel their tongues to the service of his ears.

"You observe on my walls here," the veteran virtuoso continued, revolving slowly on his pivot, "one water-color and a lot of trifles—photographs, pen-and-ink drawings, and so forth—most of them rather bad. The paint-

ing itself is none too good; I should not like to have my taste in such things judged by it. But observe: it is the work of a young friend, and into every inch of it he has put something of his heart, for it was done in the hope of pleasing me. The carved oak frame, too, is one of his own creation, the mat (of copper)—all. Would the costliest and ugliest of old masters give me as much pleasure? You, yes; but, dear fellow, you are not considered.

“See that pen-and-ink head—there are better. But it is a first attempt, done by the uninstructed young girl whose photograph you see alongside. She is to be a great artist some day, but none of her work will have to me the interest and value of that.

“Ah, those faded and soiled little photographs—Mary, Hélène, Katy, the divine Josie and the rest—you need not look at them; they are merely little soft spots for *my* eyes to fall upon and rest. Why, sir, there’s not the most trifling object in this room but has a hundred tender recollections clinging to it like bats to a stalactite—swarming about it like bees about Hymettus. Should I replace them with ‘works of art’ bought in the shops and damnably authenticated?

“This room is for me. I live here, read

here, write here, smoke here. Wherever my eye falls, it rests upon something that starts a train of thought and emotion infinitely more agreeable, and I believe more profitable, than any suggested by the work of a hand that I never grasped, guided by however sure an eye that never looked into mine. Don't, I pray you, take the trouble to appear to be interested in these things, such as a country maiden might decorate her sleeping room withal. (Ah, happy country maiden, untaught in the black art of showing off!) Don't, I beg, give anything here a second glance: 'there was no thought of pleasing thee' when it was put here.

"Come," concluded the Sentimental Bachelor, taking his hat and stick, "let us go to the Park. I want to show you the fine Rembrandt that I presented to the Art Gallery. Celestine adored it."



THE MARCH HARE



A FLOURISHING INDUSTRY

THE infant industry of buying worthless cattle, inoculating them with pleuro-pneumonia and tuberculosis, and collecting the indemnity when they are officially put to death to prevent the spread of the contagion, is assuming something of the importance and dignity of a national pursuit. The proprietors of one of the largest contageries on Long Island report that the outlook is most encouraging; they begin each fiscal year with a large surplus in their treasury. Some of the Western companies, too, have been highly prosperous and intend to mark their gratification by an immediate issue of new shares as a bonus.

The effect of this industry upon pastoral pursuits is wholesome. The stock ranges of Texas, Wyoming and Montana thrill with a new life, and it is estimated that their enlargement during the next few years will bring not less than five million acres of public land into the service of man and beast. The advantage to manufacturers of barbed-wire fencing is

obvious, while the indirect benefit to agriculture through the enhanced price of this now indispensable material will supply the protectionist with a new argument and a peculiar happiness. Cattle-growing has hitherto been attended with great waste. A large percentage of the "stock on hand" was unsalable. Failure of the cactus crop, destitution of water and prevalence of blizzards, together with such natural ills as cattle flesh is heir to, have frequently so reduced the physical condition of the herds that not more than a half would be acceptable to the buyer. The ailing remainder were of little use. A few of the larger animals could be utilized by preparing them as skeletons of buffaloes for Eastern museums of natural history, but the demand was limited: nine in ten were suffered to expire and become a dead loss. These are now eagerly sought by agents of the contageries, purchased at good prices, driven by easy stages to the railways and, arriving at their final destination, duly infected. They are said to require less infection than they would if they were in good condition, with what the life insurance companies are pleased to call a fair "expectation of life." Some of the breeders prefer to isolate these failures and do

their own infecting; but the tendency in the cattle trade, as in all others, is toward division of labor. The regular infectionaries possess superior facilities of inoculation, and government inspectors prefer to do business at a few great pleuro-pneumoniacal and tubercular centers rather than make tedious journeys to distant ranges. The trend of the age is, in fact, toward centralization.

The effect of the new industry upon commerce cannot be accurately foreseen, but it is natural to suppose that it will largely increase the importation of lowgrade cattle from South America. Hitherto it has not been profitable to import any that were unfit for beef. But if the *Bos inedibilis*, the milkless crowbait and other varieties "not too good for human nature's daily food"—in fact not good enough—can be laid down in New York or New Orleans at a cost of not more than thirty dollars each, including the purchase price of ten cents, and inoculated before they have eaten their heads off, there would seem to be a reasonable margin of profit in the traffic. If not, the legal allowance for their condemnation and slaughter can be easily increased by legislative action. If Congress will do nothing to encourage capital in that direction the

372 THE COLLECTED WORKS

States most benefited by this extension of American commerce can respond to the demand of the hour with a judicious system of bounties. Importation of cheap foreign cattle eligible to pleuro-pneumonia and the junior disorder will provide employment to a great number of persons who, without apt appropriation's artful aid, might languish on farms and in workshops, a burden to the community and a sore trial to themselves.

THE RURAL PRESS

THERE will be joy in the household of the country editor what time the rural mind shall no longer crave the unwholesome stimuli provided by composing accounts of corpulent beetroots, bloated pumpkins, dropsical melons, aspiring maize, and precocious cabbages. Then the bucolic journalist shall have surcease of toil, and may go out upon the meads to frisk with kindred lambs, frolic familiarly with loose-jointed colts and exchange grave gambolings with solemn cows. Then shall the voice of the press, no longer attuned to praise of the vegetable kingdom, find a more humble but not less useful employment in calling the animal kingdom to the evening meal beneath the sanctum window.

To the overworked editor life will have a fresh zest, a new and quickening significance. The hills shall seem to hump more greenly up to a bluer sky, the fields to blush with a tenderer sunshine. He will go forth at dawn executing countless flip-flaps of gymnastic

374 THE COLLECTED WORKS

joy; and when the white sun shall redden with the blood of dying day, and the pigs shall set up a fine evening hymn of supplication to the Giver of All Swill he will be jubilant in the editorial feet, blissfully conscious that the editorial intellect is a-ripening for the morrow's work.

The rural newspaper! We sit with it in hand, running our fingers over the big, staring letters, as over the black and white keys of a piano, drumming out of them a mild melody of perfect repose. With what delight one disports him in the deep void of its nothingness, as who should swim in air! Here is nothing to startle, nothing to wound. The very atmosphere is suffused and saturated with "the spirit of the rural press;" and even one's dog sits by, slowly dropping the lids over its great eyes; then lifting them with a jerk, tries to look as if it were not sleepy in the least degree. A fragrance of plowed fields comes to one like a benediction. The tinkle of ghostly cowbells falls drowsily upon the ear. Airy figures of prize esculents float before the half-shut eyes and vanish before perfect vision can attain to them. Above and about are the drone of bees and the muffled thunder of milk-streams shooting into the

foaming bucket. The gabble of distant geese is faintly marked off by the barking of a distant dog. The city, with all its noises, sinks away, as from one in a balloon, and our senses swim in the "intense inane" of country languor. We slumber.

God bless the man who invented the country newspaper!—though Sancho Panza blessed him long ago.

“TO ELEVATE THE STAGE”

THE existence of a theatrical company, composed entirely of Cambridge and Harvard *alumni* who have been in jail strikes the imagination with a peculiar force. In the theatrical world the ideal condition conceived by certain social philosophers is being rapidly realized and reduced to practice. “It does not matter,” say these superior persons, “what one does; it is only important what one is.” The theater folk have long been taking that view of things, as is amply attested by the histrionic careers (for examples) of Mrs. Lily Langtry and Mr. John L. Sullivan. Managers—and, we may add, the public—do not consider it of the least importance what Mrs. Langtry *does* on the stage, nor how she does it, so long as she *is* a former favorite of a Prince and a tolerably fair counterpart of a Jersey cow. And who cares what Mr. Sullivan’s pronunciation of the word “mother” may be, or what degree of sobriety he may strive to simulate?—in seeing his perform-

ance we derive all our delight from the consciousness of the great and godlike thing that he has the goodness to *be*.

It is needless to recall other instances; every playgoer's memory is richly stored with them; but this troupe of convicted collegians is the frankest application of the principle to which we have yet been treated. At the same time, it opens up "*vistas*" of possibilities extending far-and-away beyond what was but yesterday the longest reach of conjecture. Why should we stop with a troupe of educated felons? Let us recognize the principle to the full and apply it with logical heroism, unstayed by considerations of taste and sense. Let us have theater companies composed of reformed assassins who have been preachers. A company of deaf mutes whose grandfathers were hanged, would prove a magnetic "*attraction*" and play to good houses—that is to say, they would *be* to good houses. In a troupe of senators with warts on their noses the pleasure-shoving public would find an infinite gratification and delight. It might lack the allurements of feminine charm, most senators being rather old women, but for magnificent inaction it would bear the palm. Even better would be a company of distinguished

378 THE COLLECTED WORKS

corpses supporting some such star inactor, as the mummy of his late Majesty, Rameses II of Egypt. In them the do-nothing-be-something principle would have its highest, ripest and richest development. In the broad blaze of their histrionic glory Mrs. Langtry would pale her uneffectual fire and Mr. Sullivan hide his diminished head.

From the example of such a company streams of good would radiate in every direction, with countless ramifications. Not only would it accomplish the long desired "elevation of the stage" to such a plane that even the pulpit need not be ashamed to work with it in elicitation of the human snore, but it would spread the light over other arts and industries, causing "the dawn of a new era" generally. Even with the comparatively slow progress we are making now, it is not unreasonable to hope that eventually Man will cease his fussy activity altogether and do nothing whatever, each individual of the species becoming a veritable monument of philosophical inaction, rapt in the contemplation of his own abstract worth and perhaps taking root where he stands to survey it.

PECTOLITE

THIS is one of the younger group of minerals: it was discovered by a German scientist in 1828. For its age it is an exceptionally interesting stone—if it is a stone. Its most eminent and distinguishing peculiarity is described as the “property of parting with minute splinters from its surface upon being handled, these splinters or spicules piercing the hand, producing a pain similar to that experienced by contact with a nettle.”

In the mineral kingdom pectolite ought to take high rank, near the very throne. In its power of annoying man it is a formidable competitor to several illustrious members of the vegetable kingdom, such as the nettle, the cactus, the poison ivy and the domestic briar. There are, indeed, several members of the animal kingdom which hardly excel it in the power of producing human misery. Considering its remarkable aptitude in that bad way, its rarity is somewhat difficult to understand, and is perhaps more apparent than real. Pro-

380 THE COLLECTED WORKS

fessor Hanks says that previously to its discovery in California it had been found in only eight places. If upon investigation these should turn out to be Europe, Asia, Africa, North and South America, Australia and the two Polar continents, the unnatural discrepancy between its objectionable character and its narrow distribution would be explained away, and pectolite seen to be "in touch" with its sister malevolences, whose abundance is usually in the direct ratio of their noxiousness to man.

In his efforts to make this uncommon mineral known, advance its interests and bring it into closer relations with mankind, Professor Hanks is winning golden opinions from the manufacturer of arsenic, the promoter of the Canadian thistle, and the local agent of the imported rattlesnake. The various uses to which it can be put are obvious and numberless. As a missile in a riot—the impeller wearing a glove, but the other person having nothing to guard his face and eyes—its field of usefulness will be wide and fertile. Small fragments of it attractively displayed here and there about the city will give a rich return of agony when thoughtlessly picked up. For village sidewalks inimical to the thin shoe

of the period it would be entirely superior to the knotty plank studded with projecting nail heads. With a view to these various "uses of adversity," it would be well for Professor Hanks to submit careful estimates of the cost of quarrying it and transporting it to places where it can be made to do the greatest harm to the greatest number. To assist and further the purposes of Nature, as manifested in the character of the several agencies and materials which she employs, is the greatest glory of science. A human being assailed by all the natural forces, seizing a stone to defend himself and getting a fistful of pectolitic spiculæ, is a spectacle in which one can get as near and clear a glimpse of the Great Mystery as in any; and science is now prepared to supply the stone.

LA BOULANGÈRE

A ONCE famous American actress, Miss Mary Anderson—sometimes, I think, called “Our Mary”—was an accomplished baker. Among her personal friends, those at least who had the happiness to dine at her home, she had a distinguished reputation as a bread-maker. She was once persuaded to make public the prescription that she used, through the *London Times*, thus materially enlarging her practice by addition of many new patients. I regret my inability to reproduce the prescription here for the benefit of such house-keepers as are unfettered by Colonial tradition—who, not having inherited the New World system from their great-grandmothers, might be accessible to the light of a later dispensation. For bread-making is, I think, a progressive science in which perfection is not attained at a bound by merely “dissolving the political bands” which connect one country with another.

History is garrulous of our Revolutionary

sires: their virtues and other vices are abundantly extolled; but concerning our Revolutionary dames the trumpet of fame remains mysteriously and significantly reticent—a phenomenon not easily accounted for on any hypothesis which assumes or concedes their worth. Historians, poets and those, generally, who have possession of the public ear and hold it from generation to generation, seem to feel that the less said about these merry old girls the better. I believe the secret of it lies in the consciousness of the literary class that the mothers of the Republic made treasonably bad bread, and that their sins of that sort are being visited upon their children, even to these third and fourth generations, and (which is worse) practiced by them. No doubt the success of the Revolutionary War would have been achieved later if our brave grandfathers had not been fortified in body and spirit by privation of the domestic loaf of the period, known to us through the domestic loaf of our own. To immunity from the latter desolating agency the soldiers on both sides in the more recent and greater conflict were obviously indebted for the development of that martial spirit which made them so reluctant to stop fighting

and go home. It must be said, however, in defence of the Bread of Our Union that if one is going to eat the salt-spangled butter which also appertains to the home of the brave it really does not greatly matter what one eats it on.

America's dyspepsia is not entirely the product of the frying-pan, the pie and the use of the stop-watch at meals. Any wholesome reform in bread-making as practiced darkly in the secrecy of our kitchens, will materially mitigate the national disorder; though even bread made according to the plans and specifications of Our Mary can hardly be expected to manifest all its virtues if eaten blazing hot. Whatever may be the outcome of Mistress Mary's quite contrary way of imparting her sacred secret to a foreign newspaper and ignoring the press of her own country—whether anybody now compounds bread after her prescription or not, or if anybody does, whether anybody else will eat it—this much was accomplished: she showed that at least one American woman was not afraid to tell the world and the public prosecutors how she made bread. As a bread-maker she was indubitably gifted with the divine audacity of genius.

ADVICE TO OLD MEN

IT goes without saying that among the elements of success a broad and liberal total abstinence is chief. The old man who gets drunk before dinner is born to failure as the sparks fly upward. Diligence in business is another qualification that needs not be particularly dwelt upon; the old man who seeks his ease while his young and energetic employees, trained to habits of industry, are stealing all the profits of the business will find his finish where he did not lose it. He is beyond the reach of remonstrance.

Study the rising old man. You will find him invariably distinguished by seriousness. He is not given to frivolity. He does not play at football. He does not contribute jokes to the comic papers. He does not waste his time kissing the girls. The rising old man is all business. We can all be that way if we are old enough to have no infrangible habits.

As to manners, and these are of the utmost importance, a deferential and reverent atti-

ude toward youth has a commercial value that it would be hard to appraise too highly. Remember, old man, that the youth whom you employ to-day you may serve to-morrow, if he will have you. It is worth while to make him admire you, and the best way to do so is to show him that you respect him. There are certain virtues that win the admiration of all; let him think that you think that he has them.

A most desirable quality in an old man is modesty. It is not only valuable as a mental equipment necessary to success, it is right and just that you should have it. Pray do not forget, in the exultation of growing old, that age is peculiarly liable to error through the glamour of experience. To the errors of age and experience are attributable most of those failures which come to us in the later life. We can not help being old, but Heaven has not denied us the opportunity to take counsel of youth and ignorance. Some one has said that the way to succeed is to think like a philosopher and then act like a fool. The thinking being needless, a mere intellectual luxury, and therefore a sinful waste of the time allowed us for another and better purpose, renounce it. As to action, study the young. Every successful man was once young.

Do not try to get anything for nothing: when you have obtained a liberal discount for cash you have done much; do the rest by paying the cash. An honest old man is the pride and glory of his son.

Dig, save, fast, go as nearly naked as the law allows, and if Heaven does not reward you with success you will nevertheless have the satisfaction that comes of the consciousness of being a glittering example to American age.

A DUBIOUS VINDICATION

HARDLY any class of persons enjoys complete immunity from injustice and calumny, even if "armed with the ballot"; but probably no class has so severely suffered from Slander's mordant tooth as our man-eating brethren of that indefinite region known as the "Cannibal Islands." Nations which do not eat themselves, and which, with even greater self-denial, refrain from banqueting on other nations, have for generations been subjected to a species of criticism that must be a sore trial to their patience. Every reprobate among us who has sense enough to push a pencil along the measured mile of a day's task in a newspaper office without telling the truth has experienced a sinful pleasure in representing anthropophagi as persons of imperfect refinement and ailing morals. They have been censured even, for murder; though surely it is kinder to take the life of a man whom you set apart for your dinner than to eat him struggling. It has

been said of them that they are particularly partial to the flesh of missionaries.

It appears that this is not so. The Rev. Mr. Hopkins, of the Methodist Church, who returned to New York after a residence of fifteen years in the various islands of the South Pacific, assured his brethren that in all that period he could not recollect a single instance in which he was made to feel himself a comestible. He averred that his spiritual character was everywhere recognized, and so far as he knew he was never in peril of being put to the tooth.

His testimony, unluckily, has not the value that its obvious sincerity and truth merit. In point of physical structure he was conspicuously inedible; so much so, in truth, that an unsympathetic reporter coldly described him as "fibrous" and declared that in a country where appetizers are unknown and pepsin a medicine of the future, Mr. Hopkins could under no circumstances cut any figure as a viand. And this same writer meaningly inquired of the cartilaginous missionary the present address of one "Fatty Dawson."

Fully to understand the withering sarcasm of this inquiry it is necessary to know that the person whose whereabouts it was desired to

ascertain was a co-worker of Mr. Hopkins in the same missionary field. His success in spreading the light was such as to attract the notice of the native king. In the last letter received from Mr. Dawson he explained that that potentate had just done him the honor to invite him to dinner.

Mr. Hopkins being a missionary, one naturally prefers his views to those of anyone who is still in the bonds of iniquity, and moreover, writes for the newspapers; nevertheless, I do not see that any harm would come of a plain statement of the facts in the case of the Rev. Mr. Dawson. He was not eaten by the dusky monarch—in the face of Mr. Hopkins' solemn assurance that cannibalism is a myth, it is impossible to believe that Mr. Dawson was himself the dinner to which he was invited. That he was eaten by Mr. Hopkins himself is a proposition so abysmally horrible that none but the hardest and most impenitent calumniator would have the depravity to suggest it.

THE JAMAICAN MONGOOSE

WHEN man undertakes for some sordid purpose to disturb the balance of natural forces concerned in the conservation and in the destruction of life on this planet he is all too likely to err. For example, when some public-spirited Australian, observing a dearth of donkeys in his great lone land, thoughtfully imported a shipload of rabbits, believing that they would grow up with the country, learn to carry loads and eventually bray, he performed a disservice to his fellow colonists which they would gladly requite by skinning him alive if they could lay hands on him. It is well known that our thoughtless extermination of the American Indian has been followed by an incalculable increase of the grasshoppers which once served him as food. So strained is the resulting situation that some of our most prominent seers are baffled in attempting to forecast the outcome; and it is said that the Secretary of Agriculture holds that farming on this continent is doomed

392 THE COLLECTED WORKS

unless we take to a grasshopper diet ourselves.

The matter lends itself to facile illustration: one could multiply instances to infinity. We might cite the Australian ladybird, which was by twenty well defined and several scientists brought here and acclimated at great expense to feed upon a certain fruit pest, but which, so far, has confined its ravages mainly to the fruit.

The latest, and in some ways the most striking, instance of the peril of making a redistribution of the world's fauna, is supplied by the beautiful tropical isle of Jamaica, home of the Demon Rum. It appears that someone in Jamaica was imperfectly enamored of the native rats, which are creatures of eminent predacity, intrepid to a degree that is most disquieting. This person introduced from a foreign land the mongoose—an animal whose name it seems prudent to give in the singular number. The mongoose, as is well known, is affected with an objection to rats compared with which the natural animosity of a dog to another dog is a mild passion indeed, and that of a collector of customs to holy water seems hardly more than a slight coolness. Jamaica is now ratless, but, alas, surpassingly tickful.

The ticks have so multiplied upon the face of the earth that man and beast are in equal danger of extinction. The people hardly dare venture out-of-doors to plant the rum vine and help the north-bound steamers to take on monkeys. The mongoose alone is immune to ticks.

It appears that when this creature had effaced the rats it was itself threatened with effacement from lack of comestible suited to its tooth; but instead of wasting its life in repinings and unavailing regrets—instead of yielding to the insidious importunities of nostalgia, it fell upon the lizards and banqueted royally if roughly; and soon the lizards had gone to join the rats in the Unknown. Now, the Jamaica lizard had for countless ages “wittled free” upon ticks, maintaining among them a high death-rate with which, apparently, their own dietetic excesses (for ticks are greatly addicted to the pleasures of the table) had nothing to do. The lizard abating his ravages, through being himself abated by the mongoose, the tick holds dominion by the unchallenged authority of numbers. Man, the whilom tyrant, flees to his mountain fastnesses, the rum vine withers in the fields and the north-bound steamer sails monkeyless

away. Jamaica's last state is worse than her first and almost as bad as ours. She is as yet, however, spared the last and lowest humiliation that a brave and generous people can experience; her parasites do not pose as patriots, nor tickle the vanity of those whom they bleed.

FS1097

1909

V. 10



